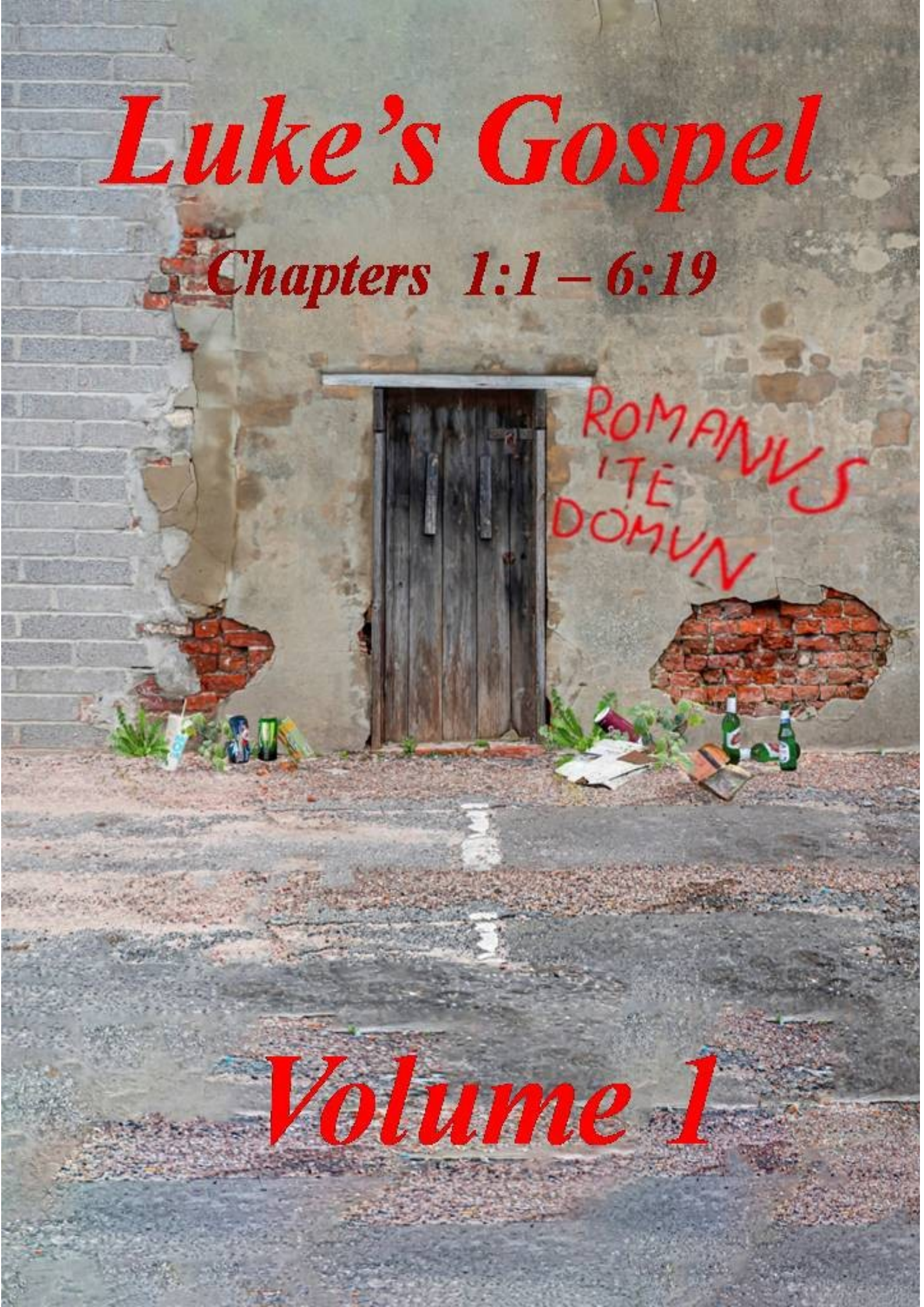
Luke's Gospel

Chapters 1:1 – 6:19



Volume 1

About the cover.

I am very grateful to my dear friend Christine “Chris” Eaves, who has given her time and skill to producing the covers for the 6 Volumes of Luke’s Gospel. The covers show the gradual revelation of Jesus, as you progress from a closed door, to an open door, revealing the Saviour. The covers are a sermon in their own right.

About the artist.

Chris has always been interested in photography. For many years, she sold artwork in local galleries and used photography just as a reference. Gradually though, and with the introduction of digital cameras, the photography became more important than painting.

Chris lives in Weymouth on the South Coast of the UK and works right opposite Weymouth Beach, which presents many opportunities for photography and the light is constantly changing. A few years ago she won a national photography magazine competition and the prize was a Canon 450D.

In Autumn, 2011, Chris was one of the 12 finalists (out of 55,000 entries) in the BBC TV's Countryfile Calendar Competition. “This has given me great spur to push on in this fantastic world of photography. This is a wonderful world and there is so much that I'd love to do, and yet, it seems that time here is so short. I try not to waste a moment!”

A devout Christian, Chris uses her talent to provide devotionals from nature, calendars, linking Scriptures with pictures, to inspire other Christians to look with a discerning eye on the Creator of the Universe, Jesus Christ.

Please visit Chris’s website when you have a moment. https://www.chriseavesphotography.co.uk/

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Dedication

This 6 Volume series comprise the ministries given between **October 2021** and **March 2024**.

To those who sat through these ministries, I thank you for your encouragement to me and I hope you too have been encouraged.

Thanks to my amanuensis Shelley for her continual encouragement to get this book published and her gracious correction, suggestions and support to me.

My gratitude goes also to my wife Diana who has encouraged my recovery and been a source of strength, inspiration and love. She has always been there for me, physically and spiritually, on my path back from a stroke.

Love in Jesus,
Mike 24th August 2024

P.S. Do contact me with any queries michael.winnett@ntlworlld.com

Where a Bible version is not stated it is the Authorised Version, otherwise:

- CEV Contemporary English Version
- Darby John Nelson Darby Translation
- ERV Easy to Read Version
- Geneva 1587 Version
- GNB Good News Translation
- GW God's Word
- ISV International Standard Version
- KJV Kings James Version
- LEB Lexham English Version
- LITV Literal Translation of the Holy Bible
- LXX Septuagint
- RSV Revised Standard Version
- YLT Young's Literal Translation

Scripture quotations are in ***italic script***. All versions can be found in e-Sword. e-Sword is a fast, effective and free way to study the Bible. e-Sword is feature rich and user friendly with more capabilities than you would expect in a free Bible study app. Blessings upon Rick Meyers for e-Sword **http://www.e-sword.net/** Please send him a contribution if you have not already.

1. Introduction. *Luke 1: 1 - 4*

Luk 1:1 Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, Luk 1:2 Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; Luk 1:3 It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, Luk 1:4 ***That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed****.*

The word translated "certainty" also means "safety". It comes from an ancient Greek word for "Asphalt". The ancient Mesopotamians used it to waterproof temple baths and water tanks. The Phoenicians caulked the seams of their merchant ships with asphalt. In the days of the Pharaohs, Egyptians used the material as mortar for rocks laid along the banks of the Nile to prevent erosion, and the infant Moses' basket was waterproofed with asphalt. The Ark of Noah was sealed with asphalt. The first recorded use of asphalt as a road-building material is in Babylon. The Romans used it to seal their baths, reservoirs and aqueducts. They were safe and secure from leaks.

The Gospel of Luke, I suppose you might say, is watertight, is safe. But among so much certainty, we must ask why there are so many interpretations of the Gospels, why there are so many different groups all claiming to be correct, claiming to hold THE truth. Well they cannot all be right and this is where we come to the point. How much have these people used the Gospels and the Scriptures as they were intended to be used, and how much have they added in traditions, myths and speculation, to muddy and distort the Gospel.

Let me give you an example. The Lord's Table is a festival that occurred at the Passover. The wine that Jesus says is "His blood" is taken by some people, to be a direct copy of the Jewish Seder table with its four cups of wine. But can you find anywhere in Scripture where wine is used in the original Passover feast? No, you cannot, so relating wine to a Jewish feast is unbiblical. Jesus is doing a new and non-Jewish thing. I will come back to this later in the series.

The Jews added many traditions to the law and you can find these in the Mishnah or Mishna and it is **the first major written collection of the Jewish oral traditions known as the Oral Torah**. It is also the first major work of rabbinic literature. Add to this the traditions and dogmas of the church over the centuries, bind them all together and you have a pseudo-gospel, truth and lies.

How can you know, as a young believer, that you are truly following the teachings of Christ? You can by holding fast to the Scripture and questioning everything that you are taught, by asking for Scriptural proof of what you are being taught from whoever the teacher is. *Act 17:10 And the brethren*

immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. Act 17:11 These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

If you will indulge me, I will tell you a story of how I was put off of religion in my childhood. I am not saying that the people who professed faith were not well meaning or kind, many of them were quite sincere, but sincerely misguided and they lacked the insight into what the Gospel consisted of.

I was bought up in the Christian tradition, so you could see that I was prejudiced from the start. The fact that my parents did not go to church, and were not believers, did not seem to bother them and was not at all hypocritical to them. The fact that they went along with Christianity and not Islam was a chance of birth and nationality. You may say, well there is truth in all religions, and that is true, but I have subsequently looked at these other religions as I have made my journey. And I have found that Christianity trumps the other religions by making two outrageous claims that none of the others do. Firstly, it claims that its founder, Christ, came back from death as proof of His claim to be the Messiah. No one else has proved their claims to be correct because they lie silent in the grave. Their claim is unverifiable. The others may have a "truth" that is alright for this life but it is not verifiable for eternity because they do not return to stake a claim upon eternity.

Secondly, and perhaps more dogmatic, and it is arrogant in the extreme, is the claim to exclusivity. *Joh 14:5 Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? Joh 14:6 Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life:* ***no man cometh unto the Father, but by me****. Joh 14:7 If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him*. No one can go to God the Father, but by the way of the Son. He is the gatekeeper for the kingdom, the barrier to heaven. How so? You may think that you can go to heaven as a right, and in going you can have anther god, or another religion, but you will encounter Christ. He will not let you in, unless in this life you have been forgiven by Him.

My first encounter with the fabric of Christianity came as a very young child, but not in an overtly religious way, but it came with the trappings of religion, which no doubt you experienced too. I refer to Christmas and Easter. In my day, the radio noted the occasions with hymns broadcast before the morning news. There were religious broadcasts every day, "lift up your hearts", "the daily service" in the morning and one short meditation in the afternoon. We sang traditional hymns at school, we had Sunday schools, and the great highlights of the year, Christmas and then Easter. It was impressed upon that tiny mind, that this was what it was all about. Getting something for nothing, whether presents or chocolate, and by being good you got your reward.

I would have believed in anything that you told me as long as I was given a present. Father Christmas and Jesus were similar, if not the same person. They both came down from above, you never saw them, they rewarded good, they hear you but don't answer, then they are gone for the year. But that didn't matter, I believed in what I was told, as long as it rewarded me. The fact that my parents told me a pack of lies didn't matter, I bought into it.

I went to a Baptist Sunday school in Hayes, and occasionally to the "mother" church in Harlington, near Heathrow. The old Baptist church stood opposite the new building, and we had our Christmas parties there. It was a dark dank building, with an unlit "U" shaped gallery going around the upper floor, and you kept close to your friends, never going anywhere alone. This sombre place summed up religion for a small boy, and that was you took what you could, when you could, and ran. Going out into the foggy stillness of a winter evening, I remember distinctly, a headstone placed at the entrance of this chapel. It was for a woman, I know not who, but she died in 1860, and she stood there, like a sentry standing guard over this building, a gatekeeper, the dead watching the living. Religion had an uncomfortable side to it, namely mortality, but that did not matter in those days of youth.

When I was about 8 years old, I had a close encounter with a religious group while on holiday. It was in Swanage, caravanning with the family, and as was their wont, we were given instructions by my parents to be quiet and go and play a long way off, while they enjoyed their Sunday afternoon nap. I wandered off with some boys and found a "tin tabernacle" painted grass green. These tabernacles were "pop up" buildings that you could buy in varying sizes to hold a different number of people. The were made of corrugated iron sheet and fitted out with seats, just like a church building and they were very popular during the 19th Century as temporary chapels. The last time I saw it was in the 1980's when it had closed and fallen into disrepair.

But this Sunday it was full of life, and located close to the caravan site was no doubt for the purpose of evangelising the holiday makers. I got a bit too close, my curiosity having got the better of me, and like a fly caught in a web, I was "captured" and ushered in by a smiling, big lady, who promptly sat down, blocking my escape, since the bench seat went up to the wall. I sat there and all I could think of was getting out from that place but more people were coming in, the faithful, acolytes and proselytes. Escape was futile. The old reed organ started puffing and blowing out the "Old hundredth", "all people that on earth do dwell, sing to the Lord with cheerful voice". I was strangely moved by the music and torn with emotion. I had to get out, and made the excuse to go to the toilet, and thereby escaped.

I learned another thing about religion. It could bring emotions up and cause so many different feelings. Were these trustworthy? Another thing that occurred to me about this time was that my parents never went to church, but I had to have a good dose of weekly religion. They managed well enough without it, but I had to have it. Would I, like them grow out of it and become good, so that I would not have to go again? I learned another lesson, that you could grow out of religion and that life could be lived without it.

Progressively, I learned that you could give the appearance of being good while inside I knew I was rotten. I learned to deceive. And I learned that I didn't get struck down for swearing, and I didn't get punished by God for those things men called sins. My experiences of religion were similar to Edmund Gosse, the author of "Father and son". It is about his journey away from the Plymouth Brethren to apostasy. He wrote this about his father's faith:

> All these matters drew my thoughts to the subject of idolatry, which was severely censured at the missionary meeting. I cross-examined my Father very closely as to the nature of this sin, and pinned him down to the categorical statement that idolatry consisted in praying to any one or anything but God himself. Wood and stone, in the words of the hymn, were peculiarly liable to be bowed down to by the heathen in their blindness.
>
> I pressed my Father further on this subject, and he assured me that God would be very angry, and would signify His anger, if any one, in a Christian country, bowed down to wood and stone. I cannot recall why I was so pertinacious on this subject, but I remember that my Father became a little restive under my cross-examination. I determined, however, to test the matter for myself, and one morning, when both my parents were safely out of the house, I prepared for the great act of heresy.
>
> I was in the morning-room on the ground-floor, where, with much labour, I hoisted a small chair on to the table close to the window. My heart was now beating as if it would leap out of my side, but I pursued my experiment. I knelt down on the carpet in front of the table, and looking up I said my daily prayer in a loud voice, only substituting the address "O Chair!" for the habitual one.
>
> Having carried this act of idolatry safely through, I waited to see what would happen. It was a fine day, and I gazed up at the slip of white sky above the houses opposite, and expected something to appear in it. God would certainly exhibit his anger in some terrible form, and would chastise my impious and wilful action. I was very much alarmed, but still more excited; I breathed the high, sharp air of defiance. But

> nothing happened; there was not a cloud in the sky, not an unusual sound in the street.
>
> Presently I was quite sure that nothing would happen. I had committed idolatry, flagrantly and deliberately, and God did not care. The result of this ridiculous act was not to make me question the existence and power of God; those were forces which I did not dream of ignoring. But what it did was to lessen still further my confidence in my Father's knowledge of the Divine mind. My Father had said, positively, that if I worshipped a thing made of wood, God would manifest his anger. I had then worshipped a chair, made (or partly made) of wood, and God had made no sign whatever. My Father, therefore, was not really acquainted with the Divine practice in cases of idolatry. And with that, dismissing the subject, I dived again into the unplumbed depths of the "Penny Cyclopaedia."

It is sad that this boy, Edmund, had seemingly lost his faith due to his father's beliefs or rather, explanation of them, and I almost lost mine due to the beliefs and practices of those around me. As I went on in life the more I became disillusioned by the lack of proof of God, and the lack of His manifestation in the so called people of God. I distinctly remember the introduction of Sunday night television in the 1950's, and this attractive "entertainment" drew away crowds from the churches. The people had found a new god, more satisfying than the old God.

Eventually, I, the prodigal returned to his heavenly Father's house, not without the scars of life, and became a Christian. Yet despite my "conversion", I bought the baggage accumulated from many years of misguided teaching, and immediately thinking that "this was the way", I fell into the mistake of repeating the errors of the past. It has taken many, many years to see the errors of my way and I am still coming to see the Jesus of the Bible, standing amidst all those caricatures of Him. I began trying to trap people into religion and a profession of "faith", catching the miserable sinners, but in all honesty they were as ignorant as me.

I aggressively pursued what I thought as Christian evangelism. I would argue with people, them and us, and I would not have them slightest empathy with them. My sole aim was to get my point across and win the argument. I pursued tracting with a vengeance, targeting supermarkets to put the Gospel out, and hiding them in the Anglican church hymn books. I even put the tracts in dogs collars in the hope that they would find their way back to the owner. I derived some satisfaction that I was doing "the Lords' works" but it was only in my imagination. I continued to practice the same as those earlier Christians did and I thought that this was how you did it, just get a profession of faith, not a commitment to Jesus. It has taken years to see that all denominations are, is a

church on a hill, built after the image of man, and just occasionally, Christ is thrown in the mix but does little to improve the situation.

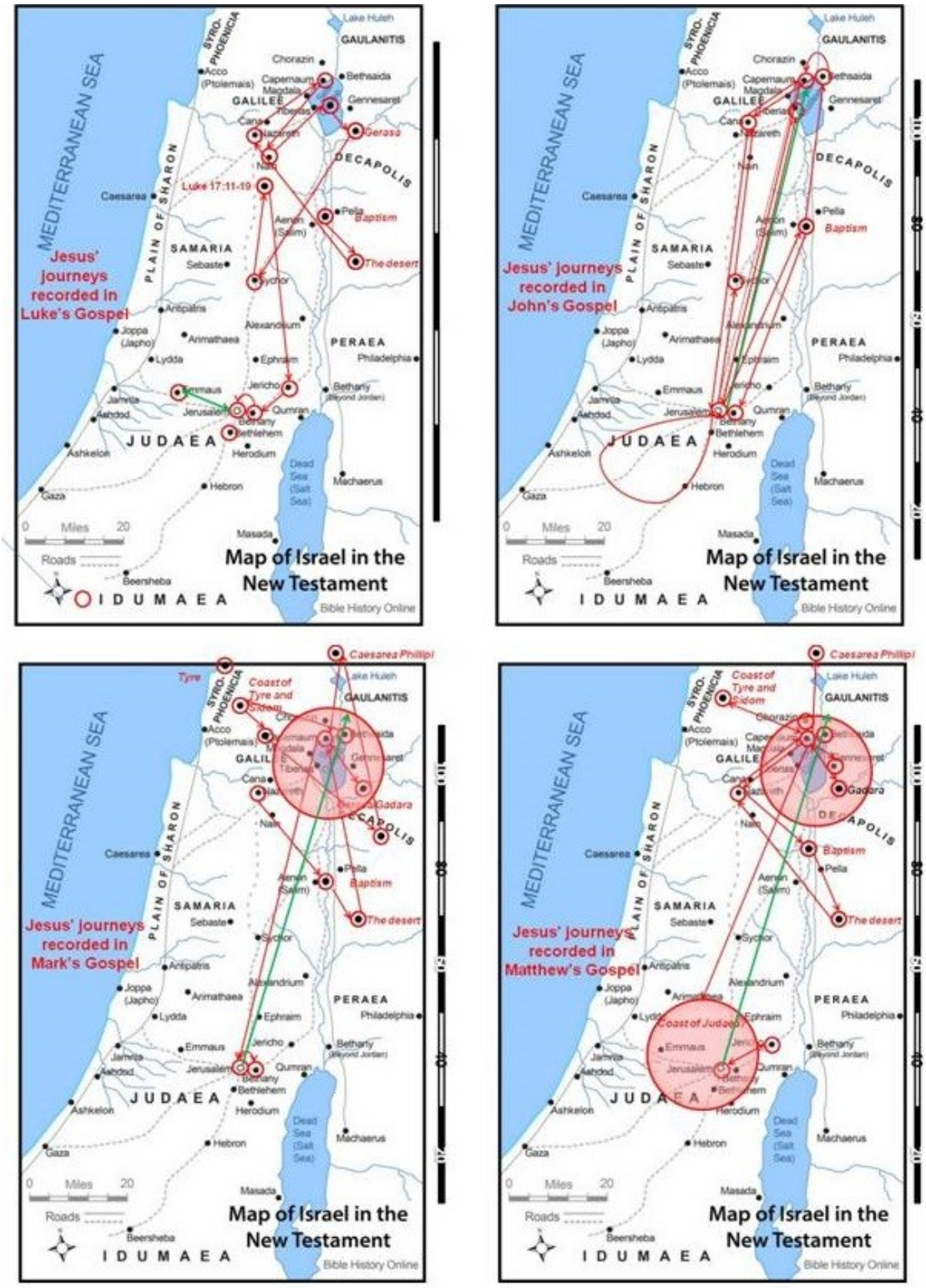
I should have read Luke's Gospel much more carefully at the beginning, when I came to Christ. It was about the Gospel, the Evangel, the good news of Jesus Christ. It was not primarily a Gospel about how to get people to believe. I am of the opinion, nowadays, that the prime directive is for mankind to know Jesus. It is not about going to church or following men who preach. Where did Jesus say that you had to go to Church? Where does the Bible say you have to go to Church? *Heb 10:24 And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Heb 10:25* ***Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together****, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching*. That is a verse that tells you how to be a Church, an assembly, not go to an assembly. If you do not know Christ, if you have not been forgiven, how on earth do you hope to be part of Christ's Church?

Luke establishes for us the historic Christ, the Christ who walked among us, not a myth, or an ethereal figure, but a man in every sense of the word, and a sinless man. You are Theophilus, the letter is for you, or else why are you reading someone else's letter? You are Theophilus, a "friend of God", and Luke is writing to you, *Luk 1:3 It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, Luk 1:4 That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed*.

Now why would he need to write to me if I was instructed? If I had a knowledge of the Gospel, surely there is no need to write. He thinks I am lacking in something. Perhaps I have got some of the dates wrong, I have muddled up the stories, perhaps I have picked up a rumour, some false news, some "fake" news. This Gospel is put out as a definitive account. Well Theophilus, this is it. As you settle down and listen, you must ask whether you believe what he is saying, or not. If he has told you the truth, you must see what the implications are for you if you neglect it, because Jesus tells you just what will happen to you.

2. Background, what you need to bear in mind

I did a study some years ago where I created four maps detailing Jesus' travels as detailed in the four Gospels.



The maps show each writers perspective, and being different, how difficult it is to make a harmony of the Gospels. The men who wrote the Gospels were not stupid, and if there were any material differences, they could have got their heads together and corrected them. They did not. They each wrote for a reason and that is why their accounts are different. These maps suggest that they are writing from different view points. In fact we would not have made Jesus'

ministry so long, 3 years, if it had not been for John, who includes more Passovers. But is John writing a linear account in time order, or an overlapping account (like Revelation) where he comes back in time to pick up the theme again, or are his stories of Jesus merely cameos of the Masters' work? You decide. It is not that important otherwise it would have been stated quite specifically by the writers.

In Luke's Gospel, I have noted the places the Jesus went to. It is written that when He began His ministry, *Luk 4:14 And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a* ***fame of him through all the region round about****. Luk 4:15 And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all. Luk 4:16 And he came to* ***Nazareth****, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read*. Did Jesus preach elsewhere, in the Synagogues of Galilee, before He came to Nazareth, as the text might suggest? It is not clear, and we have no detailed route map of where He went, so it does not appear on my map. For this reason the exact places that Jesus went to is not recorded, only those relevant to Luke's narrative.

I want to establish a few more things about these Gospels and their times. We should bear these in mind as they impact upon our understanding and interpretation of them. Repeating them does no harm.

We have been exposed to the Western Gentile Gospel, the "Christian" gospel, with its anti-semitism, with its blond long haired, white Arian Christ. With Him are a lot of priests and prophets who appear also as white, English gentlemen. Most religious paintings of the renaissance show how much this religion has been biased and prejudiced in favour of displaying a suffering Christ who has adopted our characteristics. The last supper, probably the best known painting of the age is full of stereotypes.

But most of the Gospel is actually devoted to Jewish people, swarthy, dark skinned, used to working out doors in a sunny climate. They lived, for the most, in small mud brick houses, with roofs you could walk on, and that were easily broken through (Luke 5:19). They had developed synagogues as places where they could go on Saturday, to hear the Scriptures read. Synagogues had possibly been developed for two reasons after the exile. The journey to the religious capital Jerusalem was too far, certainly more than a Sabbath day's journey, and to ensure that they obeyed the Law, it was taught weekly in the hope that they might avoid another captivity.

There had also arisen a group of ultra-religious people who controlled the Jewish people. These were the Scribes who were the calligraphists of the Law, the Sadducees or "righteous ones" who did not believe in the resurrection and the Pharisees or separatists who held rigorously to the Law. These were generally from the higher echelons of society, in positions of authority, and generally had enough leisure to go about publicly proclaiming their views and there righteousness. They were the ones who stood in the market to make long prayers and generally made a great show of their religion. There was a similar gap between the haves and the have-nots, in England in the past. The clergy lived off of the poor, not lifting a finger to help them, while preaching that they would get their reward in Heaven. They were an example of hypocrisy, little different from the Sadducees and Pharisees.

I have heard of people who would not become Christians because they knew somebody who was one. Well I agree with that somewhat jaded view because Christians can be terrible hypocrites, and that is the description I would certainly give to the religious rulers of Jesus day as well. *Mat 23:13 But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in. Mat 23:14 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation. Mat 23:15 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves*. There seems to be a division between this arrogant religious elite and the poor, simple Jewish people who were mislead by them and were like lost sheep on the mountains.

Jesus' ministry is two fold as far as Israel was concerned. It was to educate the people towards redemption and it was to bring those who rejected Him to judgement. The poor huddled masses would be freed from the tyranny of false scholarship. Those oppressed by "religion" would be freed to serve God in Spirit and Truth. And it has been the same in all the ages since then that the religious people, the ones "in the know" have not come to save the lost, but to gloat over them in their wretchedness. Ask yourself honestly where you stand in this

matter? What is your attitude to the lost? Do you really grieve for the path that they are taking?

Jesus establishes a level playing field because the Scribes and Pharisees were no better than anyone else, and were all rotten, *Rom 3:23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God*. This was an evil generation, *Luk 11:29 And when the people were gathered thick together, he began to say, This is an evil generation: they seek a sign; and there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet*. The field was truly going to be levelled, *Luk 3:4 As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight**.** Luk 3:5 Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; Luk 3:6 And all flesh shall see the salvation of God*.

Luke is the narrative of the Jews of the OT (not NT Christians), written by a gentile. It is set firmly in the OT as are the other Gospels. The OT ends with Christ's death and resurrection. We should not forget this when reading the "NT". The NT division between the OT, is an artificial construct defining the books of the Bible written after Malachi. T**he real NT is when the New Covenant comes in,** after the resurrection of Jesus. The law is firmly in place until then, *Luk 10:25 And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? Luk 10:26 He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? Luk 10:27 And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. Luk 10:28 And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live*.

The Gospels are therefore planted firmly in the OT, in the midst of the law and all that happens must be seen under the auspices of the OT, thought of in terms of the Law of Moses and its practices, right up to the time of the crucifixion. At that moment, a great change comes in. Christ's atoning death completely removes the need for Moses sacrifice. Christ's death renders man saved from sin and throws the law to where it belongs, "in shadow land". The Gospels happen in the OT.

You will find that Christians do not exist yet, in this Gospel period, *Act 11:26 And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch*. **Nazarene** was the name they took *Act 24:5 For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes:.... Mat 2:23 And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene*.

The Church did however exist in the OT, *Mat 18:17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.* The Church existed under the OT, and became the people of God in the NT. Don't believe anyone who tells you the church did not exist before Pentecost. That doctrine divides the body of Christ.

Jesus is not always preaching about sin. Sin is in a sense taken for granted as a "fact of life" among the Jews. If you were a Jew you knew what sin was, because you had to negotiate the mine field of various laws relating to God's requirements. *Rom 7:7 What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. Rom 7:8 But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead. Rom 7:9 For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.* It is stated quite concisely, *Rom 3:20 Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin*.

So when Jesus preaches sin, He preaches with compassion, not preaching with control over the sinners. He wants them to escape its clutches. Luke shows the Gospel from the Jewish point of view and in the in Acts of Apostles from the gentile point of view. In Luke's Gospel, we see how the Jew laboured under the Law as well as a hard life.

It is difficult to free one self from the religious prejudices of those around us, to be strictly objective, to have a view not tainted by man's tradition, the so called "pre-theoretical" thought, but it is possible. It just requires honesty. That honesty must start with a true view of Jesus Christ, the way, the truth and the life.

All "christian" denominations will try and sell you a form of Jesus, seen through their denominational eyes. The JW's have there own view, the Anglicans have their view, the Mormons have their view, the Baptists, Quakers, Catholics, Christadelphians and so on, all have their own view on Christ. They all have the stench of the grave about them, and for sure, as you do not find their denominations in Scripture, you will not find them in Christ's Kingdom. They die and leave their stain in the Earth. But I tell you, God never said that I should hold those views. He never told me that the first thing I needed was to join a "church" and get indoctrinated, to follow a man's word and everything would be fine eternally.

Now you may accuse me of doing the very thing that I am complaining about. I am not. I am pointing you to Christ and it is before Him that you and I will kneel, *2Co 5:9 Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. 2Co 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of*

Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. Notice what Paul says, "*Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him."*

We do not labour before men, and we certainly will not have them at our shoulder on the day of Judgement, to speak for us or help us. They will be getting their own excuses together. We will stand alone before Christ and that is why I direct the reader to Christ and Him alone. Forget the denominations which will cripple you, blind you, and corrupt your minds. I point you to Him with the earnest prayer that you will seek Him truthfully.

Joh 4:23 But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. Joh 4:24 God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. Nothing about denominations, nothing about religion, nothing about "churches".

As the Kingdom is about Christ, we ought to understand the Messenger and the message, *Luk 4:43 And he said unto them, I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent. Luk 4:44 And he preached in the synagogues of Galilee*.

And what am I? I am a Nazarine, a Christian and nothing else thank you.

3. Zacharias and Elisabeth. *Luke 1:5 - 7*

Why do we see John first and not Jesus? I think that we must get ourselves back in the day to see why. We must see through Jewish eyes. We must see the linkage between the Jewish religion and that of the Nazarene, Jesus, as being united, the one passing the baton forward to the other.

In Malachi the prophet writes, *Mal 3:1 Behold, I will send my messenger, and* ***he shall prepare the way before me****: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts*. And again in Isaiah, *Isa 40:1 Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Isa 40:2 Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD'S hand double for all her sins. Isa 40:3* ***The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD****, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Isa 40:4 Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: Isa 40:5 And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.*

Matthew saw this and wrote about it, *Mat 3:3 For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight*.

This was Elijah reborn, *Mat 11:13 For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. Mat 11:14 And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come*. He came in the Spirit of Elijah, to turn men from their way, *Luk 1:17 And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord*.

John is the greatest prophet born of woman, *Luk 7:27 This is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. Luk 7:28 For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he*.

In coming before the Messiah in time, we see John, with all the authority of a child of Aaron, handing the priesthood to Christ. He also hands the Prophetic legacy to Christ, the prophets having been silenced for at least 400 years. John is a true prophet/priest and makes Christ his beneficiary. More of that later.

Luk 1:5 There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth. Luk 1:6 And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. Luk 1:7 And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years.

At the birth of John, Herod the Great was king. He was certainly a great builder, most notably rebuilding the Temple at Jerusalem, but also the port city of Caesarea Maritime, and Masada the fortress town high in the Judean hills. The leaders of the Jews were political choices by Herod, Pharisees, Sadducees, Scribes, but there was still a following of loyal Jews to the “old ways”. No matter what rulers try to impose, the remnant remain faithful.

There is something reminiscent of Isaacs birth in John’s birth, a similarity. There are two aged parents, both are beyond their reproductive age, a messenger comes to the fathers, Abraham and Zacharias, about a man child they will be given, the children are conceived miraculously and both fathers have difficulty in accepting the event which was to happen. The two fathers begin and end the period when Israel was to be the sole beneficiary of God’s favour. A new miracle birth will start the process of the expansion of the kingdom to all nations.

The Jewish priesthood is still in place, if corrupt in part, *Luk 1:5 There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of* ***Abia****: and his wife was of the* ***daughters of Aaron****, and her name was Elisabeth. Luk 1:6 And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless*. *Luk 1:7 And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years*.

Abia or Abijah was a course of priests given the charge of the sanctuary of God, *1Ch 24:4 And there were more chief men found of the sons of Eleazar than of the sons of Ithamar; and thus were they divided. Among the sons of Eleazar there were sixteen chief men of the house of their fathers, and eight among the sons of Ithamar according to the house of their fathers. 1Ch 24:5 Thus were they divided by lot, one sort with another; for the governors of the sanctuary, and governors of the house of God, were of the sons of Eleazar, and of the sons of Ithamar…….1Ch 24:10 The seventh to Hakkoz, the eighth to Abijah, …….1Ch 24:19 These were the orderings of them in their service to come into the house of the LORD, according to their manner, under Aaron their father, as the LORD God of Israel had commanded him*.

Just how long the courses of priests ministered for is not clear, *Luk 1:23 And it came to pass, that, as soon as the days of his ministration were accomplished, he departed to his own house*. Zacharias did his shift for a number of days. The number of days may have been 14, or half a month, giving a complete rotation of the 24 priest in a year.

He then went home after completing his priestly ministry. Where was home? Scripture says that Mary visited Elizabeth at her house, *Luk 1:39 And Mary arose in those days, and went into* **the hill country** *with haste, into a city of Juda; Luk 1:40 And entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth*. It says it was in the hill country of Judah, making it almost certain to have been Hebron, the city of the priests, about 18 miles south of Jerusalem, and upwards of 81 miles from Nazareth as the crow flies. If it was at Hebron, this is another link to Abraham, who built an altar there and was buried there with his wife Sarah in the cave Machpelah.

The priests were given cities of refuge among other cities, *Num 35:6 And among the cities which ye shall give unto the Levites there shall be six cities for refuge, which ye shall appoint for the manslayer, that he may flee thither: and to them ye shall add forty and two cities. Num 35:7 So all the cities which ye shall give to the Levites shall be forty and eight cities: them shall ye give with their*

suburbs. Num 35:8 And the cities which ye shall give shall be of the possession of the children of Israel: from them that have many ye shall give many; but from them that have few ye shall give few: every one shall give of his cities unto the Levites according to his inheritance which he inheriteth. These cities of refuge were safe havens for the manslayer. The manslayer could only be free from the avenger of blood upon the death of the high priest.

Zacharias' wife was Elisabeth who was also of the family of Aaron. They were both of this priestly blood and I shall return to examine the consequences of this later. It says of them both that they were righteous, *Luk 1:6 And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and* ***ordinances of the Lord blameless***. Paul could make a similar claim, *Php 3:5 Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Php 3:6 Concerning zeal, persecuting the church;* ***touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless***. This does not mean that they were totally believing in the living God, as we shall see.

Our story goes into a lot of detail about John the Baptist. Who were the eye witnesses of these things that Luke writes? According to the Blue Bible,

> The Book of Acts also provides us with a clue as to when the gospels were written. Acts records the highlights in the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul. The book concludes with Paul at Rome awaiting trial before Caesar. It says:
>
> *Act 28:30 And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, Act 28:31 Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.*
>
> The inference is that Acts was written while Paul was still alive, seeing that his death is not recorded. Since there is good evidence that Paul died in the Neronian persecution about A.D. 67, the Book of Acts can be dated approximately A.D. 62.
>
> If Acts were written about A.D. 62, then this helps us date the four gospels. The Book of Acts is the second half of a treatise written by Luke to a man named Theophilus. Since we know that the Gospel of Luke was written before the Book of Acts, we can then date the Gospel of Luke sometime around A.D. 60 or before.

The events in Luke occur 60 years before he writes, so it must be an account given by someone alive at the time and who was relatively young at the time. One person would be Mary the mother of Jesus. She would be about 75 years old

at the time Luke wrote so it is possible this was the eye witness of these events and received the account of Zacharius from Elisabeth.

The account is given in detail, of how Zacharias went in the temple on his own, to burn incense. The original account must have come from his lips and been passed to another. *Luk 1:8 And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course, Luk 1:9 According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. Luk 1:10 And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense*.

What was the time of the incense? It was that sacred rite of God performed in the morning and the evening, *Exo 30:7 And Aaron shall burn thereon sweet incense every morning: when he dresseth the lamps, he shall burn incense upon it. Exo 30:8 And when Aaron lighteth the lamps at even, he shall burn incense upon it, a perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations. Exo 30:9 Ye shall offer no strange incense thereon, nor burnt sacrifice, nor meat offering; neither shall ye pour drink offering thereon*.

The incense that was burned was unique, *Exo 30:34 And the LORD said unto Moses, Take unto thee sweet spices, stacte, and onycha, and galbanum; these sweet spices with pure frankincense: of each shall there be a like weight: Exo 30:35 And thou shalt make it a perfume, a confection after the art of the apothecary, tempered together, pure and holy: Exo 30:36 And thou shalt beat some of it very small, and put of it before the testimony in the tabernacle of the congregation, where I will meet with thee:* ***it shall be unto you most holy****. Exo 30:37 And as for the perfume which thou shalt make,* ***ye shall not make to yourselves according to the composition thereof****: it shall be unto thee holy for the LORD. Exo 30:38* ***Whosoever shall make like unto that, to smell thereto, shall even be cut off from his people***. The Law made it an offence to copy and manufacture anything like it. You would be cut off from among the people, put out from the family of Israel for even copying the smell.

With the Law guarding the use of incense, what was it typical of? It is not as commonly stated the prayers of the saints as if the prayers worked on their own. Christ is the incense offered **with** the prayers of the saints, *Rev 8:3 And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was* ***given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints*** *upon the golden altar which was before the throne. Rev 8:4 And the smoke of* ***the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints****, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand*.

It says elsewhere, *Rom 8:26 Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Rom 8:27 And he*

that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. No wonder the Pharisee stood praying to himself, *Luk 18:11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican*. He did not have the slightest smell of Christ about him.

While Zacharias was in the temple burning the morning or evening incense, the saints were outside praying**,** *Luk 1:10 and all the multitude of the people were praying without, at the hour of the perfume*. YLT. This is all typical of the work of Christ, for the people's petitions on earth are mingled with the Saviours intercession in heaven, the Temple, *Rom 8:26 Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Rom 8:27 And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God*.

If you find prayer difficult you are not alone. Remember that not all crafted prayers are answered. Rough hewn labourers prayers are heard because they are mixed with that special ingredient, the eloquence of Christ. Always ask for Him to take the message to the Father.

While Zacharias was engaged in burning incense, an angel appeared to him, *Luk 1:11 And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. Luk 1:12 And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him*.

Like us, we get into religious rituals, never thinking about the reality of what we are doing, never for a moment expecting to see what we hope for, then in a flash an angel stands here. Zacharias may have been going through the ritual motions, but the reality of what he was doing was far from him, then he sees, all of a sudden this man standing there. What would you do if turning around, looking up, you saw a person standing there, when a second ago there was nobody. Its the stuff of nightmares. A thousand thoughts would overwhelm your conscious mind. What happened, am I dreaming, is this real, what is going on. Your amygdala (small organ in the middle of your brain) goes to work. It alerts your nervous system, which sets your body's fear response into motion. Stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline are released. Your blood pressure and heart rate increase.

For an old man this was heart attack territory.

4. The conception of John. *Luke 1:13 -17*

We left Zacharius quaking at the altar of incense, but the Angel Gabriel is quick to reassure him, “Fear not he says”. Did I say HE? Yes, because angels are described with the masculine pronoun. I say that because I do not find any female angels in the Bible. However, because they do not appear that does not mean they do not exist or do they?

It says in the resurrection we shall not marry, but that does not mean we are male and female. *Luk 20:34 And Jesus answering said unto them, The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage: Luk 20:35 But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: Luk 20:36 Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection.*

But if we are “*equal unto the angels”*, that implies there are women who become equal to angels and men who become equal to angels. Now that does not mean there shall be men and women angels but that we shall be like them, ἰσάγγελος = isaggelos, or equal to them in status.

Do we become like the angels and have no sexual identifier, or do we all become male? Angels are not male or female in the way that humans understand and experience gender. Whenever angels are mentioned in the Bible, the word translated “angel” is always used in the masculine form. Also, when angels appeared to people in the Bible, they were always seen as men and when they were given names, the names were always masculine. Angels however are spiritual beings and we have little knowledge of existence in that realm.

When our body is given up to the grave, the material that identifies us as mortal humans decomposes, the chromosomes, proteins and carbohydrates are all left to rot down. We take none of that earthly material with the spirit and we have lost our physical body, as Paul says, *1Co 15:44 It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.* So our heavenly body is not of this earthly making, but spiritual. Men and women cease to have that which distinguished them.

I would make the following suggestions. The angels do not marry because there is no reproductive mechanism and therefore they have no children. They could not breed with us because of this. Whether they look entirely as we expect a male to look is unclear. They are each unique creations of God, without any redemptive head, they remain elect or reprobated, *1Ti 5:21 I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality*. They are given the gender of males, because they are created after Christ, who became a man not woman. Although we are like angels in the resurrection, we

shall judge them, so presumably we are above them, but like them, *1Co 6:3 Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life?*

Gabriel appears in the OT and the NT. *Dan 9:21 Yea, whiles I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation*. He is not as some say an archangel, or chief angel, but an angel, the title archangel being given to Michael, who I think may be Christ. Gabriel means "strong man of God".

Gabriel tells Zachariah the name of his son, John, *Luk 1:13 But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John*. As his name came from heaven, like Jesus, I suppose that there is not a new name for him as there will be for us. *Rev 2:17 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.*

Gabriel then proceeds to describe in detail the man, John. *Luk 1:14 And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. Luk 1:15 For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall* ***drink neither wine nor strong drink****; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. Luk 1:16 And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. Luk 1:17 And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord*.

The first part describes the man's character from birth, and the second part describes the man's task in life.

Firstly John was to be a Nazarite. What is a Nazarite? The word comes from a root meaning separate. It was a man or woman who had taken a vow to be holy to the Lord, to be set apart, separated to Him. *Num 6:2 Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When either* ***man or woman*** *shall separate themselves to vow a vow of a Nazarite, to separate themselves unto the LORD: ……Num 6:8 All the days of his separation he is* ***holy unto the LORD***.

He was forbidden the fruit of the vine, in fact he was not allowed any part of the vine tree, *Num 6:3 He shall separate himself from wine and strong drink, and shall drink no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of strong drink, neither shall he drink any liquor of grapes, nor eat moist grapes, or dried. Num 6:4 All the days of his separation shall he eat nothing that is made of the vine tree, from the kernels even to the husk*.

Why was this? I think it shows growth to the Lord, *Lev 25:4 But in the seventh year shall be a sabbath of rest unto the land, a sabbath for the LORD: thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard. Lev 25:5 That which groweth of its own accord of thy harvest thou shalt not reap, neither gather the grapes of* ***thy vine undressed****: for it is a year of rest unto the land*. More correctly, "undressed vine", uses the word for "separate", and should be rendered, "Nazarite vine". God wanted the fruit for Himself and the vine was consecrated a Nazarite to Him alone.

I think that this has something to do with "the True Vine", *Joh 15:1 'I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman; Joh 15:2 every branch in me not bearing fruit, He doth take it away, and every one bearing fruit, He doth cleanse by pruning it, that it may bear more fruit; Joh 15:3 already ye are clean, because of the word that I have spoken to you; Joh 15:4 remain in me, and I in you, as the branch is not able to bear fruit of itself, if it may not remain in the vine, so neither ye, if ye may not remain in me.*

The Nazarite was to be fruit to God and this is best seen in another peculiarity, *Num 6:5 All the days of the vow of his separation there shall* ***no razor come upon his head****: until the days be fulfilled, in the which he separateth himself unto the LORD, he shall be holy, and shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow. Num 6:6 All the days that he separateth himself unto the LORD he shall come at no dead body*. He was not to get his haircut, and so it grew and grew, to the Lord. I wonder whether this ties in with a woman's long hair? Also he was not to touch the dead, perhaps because his God was the God of the Living.

Samson was a perpetual Nazarite, that is from Birth to death. If you took the vow of a Nazarite, you could end the vow at any time but Samson was made a perpetual Nazarite. Samson's hair came with the power of strength. When he gave the secret of his strength to Delilah, the Lord departed from him, and he became as other men. Were all Nazarites endowed with supernatural strength. I do not think so, but by being consecrated to the Lord, they had an a limited source of power, to do what the Lord wanted. In Samson's case that was strength to overcome his enemies.

Having described his character, Luke goes on to describe his work. John's birth has similarities to Samson's birth. *Jdg 13:3 And the angel of the LORD appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, Behold now, thou art barren, and bearest not: but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son. Jdg 13:4 Now therefore beware, I pray thee, and drink not wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing: Jdg 13:5 For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines*.

John and Samson were both miraculous birth's, both of the mothers were infertile, the babies were perpetual Nazarites from their conception and they were both "deliverers" of Israel. John and Samson both began "*to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines".* Samson's dalliance with Philistine women was to further the Lord's purpose, *Jdg 14:4 But his father and his mother knew not that it was of the LORD, that he sought an occasion against the Philistines: for at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel*.

John was to take up the same task, he was going to war with the Philistines. You may think that the Philistines have long passed as a race but you would be wrong. They were the people that Abraham did not want to make marriage with, and they were the great uncircumcised, the people of lesser gods and they were Israel's nemesis. *Jdg 10:6 And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim, and Ashtaroth, and the gods of Syria, and the gods of Zidon, and the gods of Moab, and the gods of the children of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines, and forsook the LORD, and served not him. Jdg 10:7 And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hands of the Philistines, and into the hands of the children of Ammon*.

The Philistines are alive and well, both in John's day and in today. They are the people of false gods, trampling on the people of God. We only have to turn the pages of the news, or see what they are dishing up online to see the truth of this. The Christian has never been under such attack, as today when the sole aim is to silence him. A few years ago it was to compromise him, now it is to destroy him.

Against this culture and worldview, Samson was raised as a destroyer of falsehood. John too is raised for this reason, *Luk 3:4 As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight*. A voice in the wilderness, the wilderness of sin. *Luk 3:7 Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?*

John fights with the word of God, telling us that we are a generation of vipers. Snakes, serpents brood, we re not exempt the word of God, from the mouth of the prophet. This massive task was "*to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord".... Luk 1:16 And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. Luk 1:17 And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.* One man was entrusted with preparing the people of God to repent, but how he was to do this was not revealed. I assume he had thirty years to prepare this plan under God.

This introduction to John, is I think, to show what a great man that he was, as it says, *Luk 7:28 For I say to you, Among those born of a woman, no prophet is greater than John the Baptist. But the least one in the kingdom of God is greater than he is*. He is the greatest prophet until now, who ever lived, and is worthy of such an introduction to life.

That was a lot for Zacharias to take in. Having been shown the nature of his son to be he might well have gone back on his prayer. He might have wanted a son who would be quiet and stayed at home, but this person was altogether different. But the angel assures him, *Luk 1:14 And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth*.

His response to Gabriel is one of disbelief, *Luk 1:18 And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years. Luk 1:19 And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings. Luk 1:20 And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou* ***believest not my words,*** *which shall be fulfilled in their season*.

He is like Abraham, though as far as we know Abraham was not rebuked, *Gen 17:17 Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear*?
Here he is, in the sanctuary, offering prayers, yet when an angel comes with an answer to prayer he does not believe him. Was he just going through the motions of prayer, was his walk a sham, *Luk 1:6 And they were both righteous before God, walking blameless in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord*.

We might well look to ourselves, because we too are like him, we try to walk blameless in life but any sense of the supernatural is missing. We have a fictitious faith, a faith of our own making, and when confronted with the reality of faith we do not believe. We only observe the faith as far as it suits us and no more. The supernatural world, the real world for the believer is relegated to a fiction. The second coming of Christ is also made a fiction, and instead of watching for his coming we go about our business oblivious of the coming day.

It did not hinder the word of God, it only hindered Zacharias. Because of his unbelief he was dumb until the event was fulfilled. No open prayer for him, no words of wisdom, no blessings, no praises to God left his mouth until God’s will was performed. He was in effect taken out of the priesthood.

The judgement of the angel Gabriel was performed, but the angel did not appear to consult the Lord in doing this. Luk 1:20 And behold, you shall be silent and

not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which shall be fulfilled in their season. Angels carry the authority of the Creator with them, and so when the angel speaks, it is as if God spoke. He is His messenger with all the authority of the Lord.

Zachariah will be silent under God until the time is right, and the first thing he will utter is, “his name is John”.

5. The conception of Jesus. *Luke 1:26 - 33*

Luk 1:26 And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, Luk 1:27 To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. Luk 1:28 And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. Luk 1:29 And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. Luk 1:30 And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. Luk 1:31 And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. Luk 1:32 He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: Luk 1:33 And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.

Six months after the Lord removed the “reproach” from Elisabeth and she conceives, the angel Gabriel is sent on another mission to Mary, in Nazareth. You could not find a place so remote in Israel for a new leader to be born. Perched inside a bowl high on the Nazareth ridge, north of the beautiful Jezreel Valley, Nazareth was relatively isolated from trade routes. The village in the time of Jesus with a population less than two hundred people but Jerusalem was the place for a king like David not this backwater of Nazareth. It was not seemingly the place to bring up the future Messiah, but God’s ways are not our ways.

Why did the Lord choose this town? It was one of the poorest places in Israel and had a reputation for nothing good, *Joh 1:45 Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. Joh 1:46 And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see*.

The whole of the region of Galilee suffered from this reputation of having produced nothing, according to the Judeans, *Joh 7:41 Others said, This is the Christ. But some said, Shall Christ come out of Galilee? Joh 7:42 Hath not the Scripture said, That Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was*? There were numerous cultural differences. The

Pharisaic scholars of Judaism, centred in Jerusalem and Judea, found the Galileans to be insufficiently concerned about the details of Jewish observance, for example, the rules of Sabbath rest.

Was this reputation deserved or was it just the sneering of the self righteous? The population of Galilee was composed of strangely mingled elements- Aramaean, Iturean, Phoenician and Greek. In the circumstances, they could not be expected to prove such sticklers for high orthodoxy as the Judeans. Their mixed origin explains the differences in speech which distinguished them from their brethren in the South, who regarded Galilee and the Galileans with a certain proud contempt. *Mar 14:70 And he denied it again. And a little after, they that stood by said again to Peter, Surely thou art one of them: for thou art a Galilaean, and thy speech agreeth thereto.* He sounded like a yokel.

Regardless of their origins, however, the points about Galileans on which virtually everyone could agree was their fierce attachment to what they regarded as Judaism, their uncompromising patriotism, and their unstinting courage. Perhaps no sector of the Jewish population fought the Romans with more valour, refusing to surrender even when Judeans were ready to come to terms. As the great contemporary Josephus recorded, Galileans were "always able to make a strong resistance on all occasions of war; for the Galileans are inured to war from their infancy …. nor has the country ever been destitute of men of courage."

It may have been called Galilee of the gentiles but it was a fertile field, *Mat 4:14 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Mat 4:15 The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; Mat 4:16 The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up*.

It certainly did not bother the angel Gabriel what sort of place Mary came from, because he was interested in the person, *Luk 1:28 And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.* The blessed virgin though is not given much coverage herself, and questions we might like to ask of her are not answered in Scripture. She does not overshadow Jesus her Son, but humbly fades from Scripture when her task as the vessel of God, the bearer of the child is born. What makes Mary someone is Jesus and what makes anybody someone is Jesus.

It is certainly a frightening occasion for Mary, troubling her at his saying. How old was she when she had the visitation? Some people put her as young as 13 years old, but honestly, we do not know, and Scripture is silent. Joseph is also portrayed as an old man by many and is shown so in religious paintings, but the

does not square with his having further children and tramping up to Jerusalem for the yearly feasts.

Marriage took place at a young age for the ancient Jews. Most rabbis proposed 18 as the most appropriate age for men to be married, but it wasn't uncommon for them to be younger, especially in times of peace. Young women were married almost as soon as they were physically ready, approximately age 13. This puts Joseph only a few years older than Mary, and I think they would have likely been a very young couple.

This young girl had every reason to be surprised and frightened by the angel, *Luk 1:29 And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. Luk 1:30 And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God.* He puts her fears at rest but he has a message that with time will trouble her more than this annunciation.

Luk 1:31 And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. Luk 1:32 He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: Luk 1:33 And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. *Luk 1:34 Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? Luk 1:35 And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. Luk 1:36 And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. Luk 1:37 For with God nothing shall be impossible. Luk 1:38 And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her*.

Mary goes on her way rejoicing, Elizabeth goes on her way rejoicing and the mothers in Bethlehem are rejoicing at the prospect of birthing a child, who will only last in this world but a very short time. Herod who does not know that he too has a short time to live, will kill the babies in Bethlehem. Herod most likely had chronic kidney disease that was complicated by an unusual infection of the male genitalia called Fournier's gangrene, chronic kidney disease complicated by a very uncomfortable case of maggot-infested gangrene of the genitals. It was a painful and lingering death, well deserved.

Another king is in his youth, 21 year old Herod Antipas, grandson of Herod the Great, who takes over as Tetrarch of Galilee. He will have a confrontation with John that will cost the Baptist his life. This same Herod was the ruler to whom Jesus was sent before His crucifixion. The centurion at the cross was a young soldier at this time learning his brutal trade and to obey orders whatever the

cost. The man who was waiting for the angel at the sheep pool was 8 years into his infirmity, and had 30 more years to wait before he was healed. The planning of God had already encompassed these events which were as yet unknown to the world.

In the midst of the joys of life there are storms brewing, and what is more God knows and brings these things to pass at the appropriate time. God loved His son Jesus and loved the Baptist, but it would not stop them suffering in due season, but because He loved them He would not stop the suffering. It was to show the horror of living in this world. It is a world where everything is blighted by sin and death, where man goes his own evil way, and the worst of it is he does not see it because he is delusional. It is not the wishy washy world of some Christians, the everlasting Christmas days, sunshine holidays on the beach, and happy deaths to go peacefully into glory. The reality is quite different. It is a cruel world, a world of pain and suffering, a world where few die without hurt or despair, a hopelessly lost world, spinning in space, a world of which they seldom ask, “Why am I here?”

If we are to make any sense of the life of this infant Jesus, we have to ask a more important question, “Why did He come to this world”? We are told*, Luk 1:31 And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. Luk 1:32 He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: Luk 1:33 And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end*.

That is quite a lot to put on baby Jesus’ shoulders. His name means Jehovah Saviour, Jesus or Joshua in the Hebrew. The Lord was by His name, to be The Saviour. He would be given the inheritance that belonged to David His father. What would the adulterous Solomon have made of that, Solomon who killed all opposition to his rule, is totally displaced? This baby was to rule over the whole of Israel, the house of Jacob, not just Judah, and that He would reign forever and have a kingdom without end, unlike Solomon the earthly son of David.

This would have been a mystery to Jews of Jesus day. It implied the “kingdom” would get a new lease of life, but in reality it had disappeared into history. David who was no more, and his poverty stricken descendants, would be elevated again, Jacob’s star would be in the ascendant and the kingdom would last forever, and that is what the Angel of God had said.

Now we know the story and the history, but the people at Jesus’ conception did not because they were living through it. Try and put yourself in their position. All that they knew was the Roman oppression and that of his client king, Herod the Great. The Jews were at the lowest ebb when this word came to Mary, and it did not to anyone else. There were acknowledgements of His Kingship by certain of

the prophets, the Maggi, the Shepherds at Bethlehem but the mass of Jewish people did not know about it, and they would not know about it for another 30 years. The child Jesus grew into the man Jesus and nothing is heard of Him until John the Baptist announces Him. This is the King who would sit on the throne of David and rule over the house of Jacob, and He does nothing at all until the age of thirty!

Contrast Jesus with Alexander the Great whose vast Empire had put the Greek language on the map, integrated nations and given a semblance of peace and stability. This article is of the about the great king:

> Alexander was born in Pella, the ancient capital of Macedonia in July 356 BC. His parents were Philip II of Macedon and his wife Olympias. Alexander was educated by the philosopher Aristotle. Philip was assassinated in 336 BC and Alexander inherited a powerful yet volatile kingdom. He quickly dealt with his enemies at home and reasserted Macedonian power within Greece. He then set out to conquer the massive Persian Empire.
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> Against overwhelming odds, he led his army to victories across the Persian territories of Asia Minor, Syria and Egypt without suffering a single defeat. His greatest victory was at the Battle of Gaugamela, in what is now northern Iraq, in 331 BC. The young king of Macedonia, leader of the Greeks, overlord of Asia Minor and pharaoh of Egypt became 'great king' of Persia at the age of 25.
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> Over the next eight years, in his capacity as king, commander, politician, scholar and explorer, Alexander led his army a further 11,000 miles, founding over 70 cities and creating an empire that stretched across three continents and covered around two million square miles. The entire area from Greece in the west, north to the Danube, south into Egypt and as far to the east as the Indian Punjab, was linked together in a vast international network of trade and commerce. This was united by a common Greek language and culture, while the king himself adopted foreign customs in order to rule his millions of ethnically diverse subjects.
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> Alexander was acknowledged as a military genius who always led by example, although his belief in his own indestructibility meant he was often reckless with his own life and those of his soldiers. The fact that his army only refused to follow him once in 13 years of a reign during which there was constant fighting, indicates the loyalty he inspired. He died of a fever in Babylon in June 323 BC aged 32 years .

That is some CV. Alexander had conquered the “known” world by the time of his death being about the same age as Jesus when He died, and Jesus had achieved hardly anything. Had Jesus lived up to the expectation of the Angel Gabriel? *Luk 1:32 He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: Luk 1:33 And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end*.

One might say, taking the prophetic word of the Angel literally, that Jesus had failed in His task and His legacy was a failure. Over time more denominations purporting to represent Him would arise, claiming to be the true church and the Angels’ word became more hollow. It became a man centred organisation and an earthly kingship of religious leaders, not a Davidic kingdom ruling Israel.

J N Darby believed that the church had fallen into such a state of ruin that there were no longer any true local churches. While the church had once been a visible body, meeting in unity, this unity had been shattered by division and corruption of doctrine. Darby saw this state of ruin manifested in the Roman Catholic Church, which he regarded as full of error and superstition. In the Protestant state churches, which he held to be contrary to Christian principle and the many dissenting denominations, which Darby believed to be schismatic and pretentious in their claim to found churches the same error was found. While other groups in history have taught the apostasy of the church, Darby was unique in holding that there was no possibility of restoration to a state comparable to the church's original standing in apostolic times. Man could not restore what God had allowed to fail. Darby's ecclesiology would seem therefore to be the most pessimistic form of ecclesiology conceivable.

This is a pessimistic picture but it depends on the view you take of the Kingdom of Christ. Is it an earthly Kingdom or is it a Heavenly Kingdom? Did He come to redeem this fallen creation or is this creation doomed to fail and the New Creation in a heavenly realm the goal? Are people raised to serve Him on earth or in heaven? We shall bear these questions in mind as we go through this study.

We take it that the words were spoken to Mary and heard by Mary alone and that they were passed on through Luke to us. The girl, Mary was either delusional, or she was lying or the events happened as they are recorded, and Luke says that it is a historical record of the facts. *Luk 1:3 So I made a careful study of everything and then decided to write and tell you exactly what took place. Honorable Theophilus, Luk 1:4 I have done this to let you know the truth about what you have heard.* CEV.

Do you go along with that? Are these the ramblings of a young Jewish girl or are they words she heard from God?

6. How shall this be? *Luke 1:34 - 38*

*Luk 1:34 Then said Mary unto the angel, **How shall this be**, seeing I know not a man? Luk 1:35 And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. Luk 1:36 And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. Luk 1:37 For with God nothing shall be impossible. Luk 1:38 And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her*.

It was a reasonable question, “How shall this be?” It seems that the girl had a maturity beyond her years, to stand before the presence of this heavenly creature and question him. She says to him, “I am a virgin, I have not had intercourse with any one, so how shall this come about?” The angel tells her that it will be by the power of God. He will intervene in her life and she will become pregnant.

In an age when people get upset by the accidental touch of a hand against them, this appears appalling behaviour. A total violation against the person, nay it could be called rape, if it were not consensual. Moreover, Joseph does not seem to enter into the conversation although he, according to the law is her husband, *Mat 1:18 This is how Jesus Christ was born. A young woman named Mary was engaged to Joseph from King David's family. But before they were married, she learned that she was going to have a baby by God's Holy Spirit*. CEV……..*Deu 22:23 If a damsel that is a virgin be betrothed unto an husband, and a man find her in the city, and lie with her; Deu 22:24 Then ye shall bring them both out unto the gate of that city, and ye shall stone them with stones that they die; the damsel, because she cried not, being in the city; and the man, because he **hath humbled his neighbour's wife**: so thou shalt put away evil from among you*.

The Scripture says, *Heb 13:4 Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge*. We should find it incredible that God would say such a thing and go against it. And what of her husband? When Christ is formed in you, it is with no other consent than yours. *Gal 4:19 My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you.* You do not need another human to grant you permission for Christ to be formed in you, no other human mediator, translator, parent guardian, god-parent, vicar, elder, pastor or any human. Its your choice if God offers it, and your choice alone. *Luk 1:38 **Mary said, "I am the Lord's servant! Let it happen as you have said."** And the angel left her*. CEV.

Christ did not enter the being of a man but of a woman, and this in part was to show the relationship between Christ and the Church. *Eph 5:31 For this cause*

shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. Eph 5:32 This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. The Church has a true relationship with Christ in her midst.

Why was it a virgin birth, parthenogenesis? Surely all birth requires sexual reproduction? Yes, that is true, even a "virgin birth", although in this case we are looking at reproduction without the use of another human being, but not without another person. "Does mankind need to be sexual for reproduction?" No, he does not as this article shows.

> One of the greatest challenges to the theory of evolution is to explain sexuality. How could sexual reproduction have emerged by random, natural processes from early life-forms practicing asexual reproduction? How could natural selection evolve two versions of a species, essentially identical except for reproductive organs? When the data is analyzed, a creation perspective may make more sense.
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> A review of the scientific literature reveals that the evolution of sexual reproduction has been described as controversial," as a "paradox", and as a "mystery." A 2002 article in Nature Reviews Genetics, states that "at least 20 theories had been proposed to explain the widespread occurrence of sexual reproduction" and a 2017 article in Trends in Ecology and Evolution observes that "many of the plausible hypotheses for sex have restrictive assumptions." Moreover, there is no hard evidence for any of the twenty or so hypotheses. Yet the most perplexing question from an evolutionary perspective is: why did advanced life-forms evolve sexuality at all? Why didn't we evolve based on asexual reproduction? To use a mythological image: why aren't we all Amazon women?
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> It should be noted that asexual reproduction can be much more complex than simple cell division (mitosis). An advantage of sexual reproduction via meiosis is the exchange of genetic material; however, this can also be done asexually. For example, the phenomenon of parasexuality describes the direct transfer of genetic material among bacteria and, as first reported in 1953, it is common in fungi. Even some higher life-forms reproduce asexually via apomixis, which is reproduction by special generative tissues without fertilization; that is, without female and male union. The term apomixis includes parthenogenesis (in which a new individual develops from an unfertilized egg) in some plants, invertebrates, and even vertebrates.
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> These and other journal articles taken together reveal an interesting picture:

• There is no consensus among evolutionary biologists about the development of sexual reproduction, and many of the hypotheses are structured as restrictive “just so stories” requiring a cascade of unlikely events.
• Most—if not all—life-forms could be configured for asexual reproduction.
• Sexual reproduction is more “expensive” than asexual reproduction; it is more difficult and requires more energy.
• From the point of view of natural selection, there is no benefit to sexual reproduction. To the contrary, asexual reproduction offers reproductive advantage over sexual reproduction.
• The real question may be how do we keep sexual reproduction—however we acquired it. Why do we and other sexual life-forms not devolve into the less “expensive” condition of asexuality?

In light of all the above, the evolution of sexual reproduction by random, spontaneous processes makes no sense. Assuming natural selection as the mechanism, evolution should have stopped with some form of asexual apomixis. Even if a life-form had happened to evolve sexual reproduction, it would have disappeared because there was no reproductive advantage.

What reason can there be for sexual reproduction? The woman was created so that man would not be on his own, showing that man is not designed to live alone. Companionship is part of the design by the Creator but that, I think, is not the reason. I think that there is a much more important reason that we have sexual reproduction, and that is because of the person of Christ.

For Christ to be a partaker of humanity he had to change his form, μορφή = morphē, and become flesh. Truly human, not similar but exactly like them. *Php 2:6 Who, being in **the form** of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: Php 2:7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him **the form** of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: Php 2:8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross*.

How is it possible for Him to become flesh and blood, if it is by **asexual** reproduction? He would then have been a mutation, a different kind of human, not of the same seed as Adam. But **sexual** reproduction allows Him to have all the genetics of Humanity and to maintain His Divinity. He would be truly God and of the seed of Adam. He would take humanity because of His X chromosome from Mary and the Divine sonship through His Y chromosome from the Father. *Heb 2:14 Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; Heb 2:15 And deliver them*

who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. Heb 2:16 For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but ***he took on him the seed of Abraham****. Heb 2:17 Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. Heb 2:18 For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted*.

Mary's "overshadowing" by the Divine has its type in the Creation and in the Cherubim overshadowing the Mercy Seat. In the Creation, the Spirit hovered or brooded in the darkness and brought forth life, *Gen 1:2 And the earth was waste and empty, and darkness was on the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.*

"Overshadow" is a word that is chosen well, "*the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God"*. We are not told how it was performed, the chemistry, the biology, the physics of the manifestation of the Almighty, just that it was done. It does not help us to know how it was done, even if we could understand it, and that would satisfy curiosity but not enlarge our faith.

God overshadowed the virgin, just as He ordered the Ark of the Covenant to be overshadowed by the Cherubim. The Ark, or chest, was a representation of Christ, as Paul clearly states in his epistle to the Romans, *Rom 3:24 being justified freely by his grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; Rom 3:25* ***whom God has set forth a mercy-seat****, through faith in his blood, for the shewing forth of his righteousness, in respect of the passing by the sins that had taken place before, through the forbearance of God*. Darby.

Here then is the focus of the religion of Israel. The Ark, which sat centrally in the Holy of Holies, the innermost sanctum of God, yet it was unseen by the nation, except through the eyes of their representative, the High Priest, and only on the Day of Atonement, *Heb 9:6 Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God. Heb 9:7 But into the second went the high priest alone* ***once every year****, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people: Heb 9:8 The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing*.

So for countless ages Christ had sat, the Lamb of God, in the darkness of the unlit chamber, awaiting the time when He would be revealed, for the great day of Atonement. When the fabric of the earthly tabernacle would be torn down, when the veil would be rent from top to bottom, Christ would be revealed.

The tabernacle of David would be rebuilt but it would be in the image of Christ, *Act 15:16 After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: Act 15:17 That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. Act 15:18 Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world*.

Christ, the Messiah, the anointed, who is called by God, Jesus, is for now in the hidden darkness of his mother's womb, overshadowed by the Father, like the Ark of God. He waits to be born, He awaits patiently the revelation of the Son of God, and the world anticipates His Coming. He will be called the Saviour of mankind, and He will offer His body as the atonement for sin, *Rom 5:11 And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement*.

God originally took a woman from a man. Here He takes God from a woman.

Luke begins his gospel with two miraculous conceptions, one according to the flesh and one according to the Spirit. One sets the seal upon the closure of the OT and the other opens the NT. The two babies born in Israel, 100 miles apart, would eventually become a global phenomenon. The two mothers, one old and the other young, could only guess at the impact of their sons. The children will grow to manhood and be executed, one for having denounced a man an adulterer, the other because the priesthood which He ordained by the hand of angels, did not want Him to rule over them.

No sooner had Mary received the word from the angel, she hurried to see Elisabeth, *Luk 1:39 And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda*; not I think because she doubted the angel, but to introduce the two babies*. Luk 1:36 And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren*. The children exchanged conscious greetings in the womb!

The question Mary asked at the beginning was "*How shall this be since I know not a man*?" A good question. You do not have to know how but it shall be a work of the Holy Spirit. Would it help you to know exactly how it was done? Would it have enriched the blind man to know how his sight was restored, *Joh 9:24 Then again called they the man that was blind, and said unto him, Give God the praise: we know that this man is a sinner. Joh 9:25 He answered and said, Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: **one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see**. Joh 9:26 Then said they to him again, What did he to thee? how opened he thine eyes? Joh 9:27 He answered them, I have told you already, and ye did not hear: wherefore would ye hear it again? will ye also be his disciples?*

The mechanism of “How” is not really relevant but the effect is. I can build my life on a rational sequence of events, cause and effect, and that might satisfy curiosity, but it is not faith, and that does not please God. I can be a rational believer, I can accept everything by proof, but it will not make me one whit a Christian. It is head knowledge not heart knowledge.

You and I undergo the same process as Mary, I too have a new birth after I am moved upon by the Spirit, *Luk 1:35 …… The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God*. As the hymn says,

O holy Child of Bethlehem,
descend to us, we pray,
cast out our sin and enter in,
be born in us today.

7. The Magnificat. *Luke 1:46 -55*

Has Mary got parents who are alive? Is she living with relatives? We do not know, we only have her genealogies. She enters to pages of Scripture on her own. While Joseph was trying to get his head around the right thing to do with his pregnant girl friend, Mary travelled south to see her “cousin”. I imagine that on her journey to see Elisabeth, coming down from Nazareth to Hebron, she thought a lot about that visitation from Gabriel. The more she thought about it, her soul overflowed with joy to the Lord.

Eventually she expressed it in this hymn of praise, the Magnificat, *Luk 1:46 et ait Maria magnificat anima mea Dominum*. The word “magnificat” comes from the Latin, to magnify, In the Greek it is μεγαλύνω = megalunō, to declare great or extol.

It seems to me that Mary had a very mature head on her shoulders. Can you think back to what you talked about when you were in your early teens? Trivia, boys and girls things, pop music, stuff of little consequence. You and I lived pampered lives compared with Mary. We had an education, welfare, schooling until at least 16 years old, a job which was fairly cushy, money and leisure time. Mary does not appear to have had any of that. She may have been taught to read but that was limited to the Torah in Synagogues. Books were expensive and rare.

Yet in framing this hymn she has created something magnificent, something the Churches have held in honour since it was first sung. Something Anglicans sing at evening prayer every week, and all of this from a girl barely into her teens. It is quite remarkable for that alone. Was it solely of her or was it Christ within her,

nestling in her womb and speaking through her mind that put these words there? Did the baby communicate with Mary? This article is typical of those about development in the womb and the consensus is that children can hear the mother

> Your voice does great things for your baby. Studies show that the sound of it is calming, both in the womb and when you finally get to meet them as a newborn. Scientists have recorded that unborn babies clearly respond to different vibrations and sounds with changes in their heart rate or movement patterns, and are particularly responsive to the sound of their mother's voice. This has led them to conclude that your unborn baby learns to recognise and remember your voice during your pregnancy. This means the conversations that you have with your bump in the third trimester are laying the foundations for their social and emotional development, as well as their language skills and memory. Your voice is already shaping their understanding of the world.

But did Jesus communicate with His mother? I think so. *Luk 1:41 And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost*: It was no ordinary baby and Jesus had a presence such that John leapt in the womb as Mary approached. Also his mother Elisabeth was filled with the Spirit. The baby, not more than a week old communicated with another being.

It was Christ's gift to Elisabeth since the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son. We should not suppose the foetal development, although limited by the human nature, should have put any constraints on the Divine nature.

> The Christian teaching that the Saviour of the world is both Divine and human is certainly a mysterious and unfathomable doctrine. For that reason it is often misunderstood and misrepresented.
>
> The most important creedal statement concerning the Incarnation is the Creed of Chalcedon. It was the Council of Chalcedon (the fourth ecumenical council) in A.D. 451 that laid down the basic boundaries concerning the orthodox view of Christ's person and nature. According to this council, Jesus Christ is one Divine Person in two natures (divinity and humanity). Thus the Chalcedon Creed became, and continues to be, the normative standard for the orthodox doctrine of Christ. All of Christendom (Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant) affirms the Chalcedonian formula that Jesus Christ is both God and man. This creed enunciates the orthodox doctrine of the Incarnation (specifically Christ's two natures) in the following manner:

> We all with one voice confess our Lord Jesus Christ to be one and the same Son, perfect in divinity and humanity, truly God and truly human, consisting of a rational soul and a body, being of one substance with the Father in relation to his divinity, and being of one substance with us in relation to his humanity, and is like us in all things apart from sin. He was begotten of the Father before time in relation to his divinity, and in these recent days was born from the Virgin Mary, the *Theotokos* [God-bearer], for us and for our salvation. In relation to the humanity he is one and the same Christ, the Son, the Lord, the Only-begotten, who is to be acknowledged in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, and without separation. The distinction of natures is in no way abolished on account of this union, but rather the characteristic property of each nature is preserved, and concurring into one Person and one subsistence, not as if Christ were parted or divided into two persons, but remains one and the same Son and Only-begotten God, Word, Lord, Jesus Christ; even as the Prophets from the beginning spoke concerning him, and our Lord Jesus Christ instructed us, and the Creed of the Fathers was handed down to us.
>
> The Chalcedonian formulation does not explain just *how* the two natures are united in one person, but it sets the crucial theological parameters for orthodox biblical Christology (doctrine of the person and nature of Christ).

The Divine nature was always there to see, in Christ, if you have eyes to see. When Christ agreed with the Father that the time had come for the incarnation, He did not give up the Divine to become human. He took the form of a man, and was by this act, God unchanged, while gradually taking upon Himself the flesh, weaving the bones. *Heb 2:14 Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood,* ***he also himself likewise took part of the same****; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;*

Yes, He laid His glory by, but He did not lay aside His divinity, *Col 2:9 For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily*.

He could have said, in the words of David, *Psa 139:15 My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Psa 139:16 Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them*. So as to the human, He was "fashioned" and came into being according to the laws of creation, but the

Divine was always present. There was no time at the incarnation when the Christ was not present in His entirety.

With this in mind you see how Mary was blessed, for she did not just have a baby forming in her, she had Christ the Eternal Word. She had the inspiration of the Spirit of God. *Rom 8:26 Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Rom 8:27 And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God*.

There are men who will try and tell you what is inspired and what is not, and say only the apostles have the right to write inspired Scripture. But look here. Did Mary speak words of inspiration, and Luke who was not an apostle also, was trusted with her words, deemed them inspired enough to keep in his Gospel account? It is the voice of God that inspires, not the position of men, and it is for us to determine by the same Spirit, what are the works of God. It is not the earthly churches who determine what is Scripture but Christ only.

Mary echoes in her song, the song of other women, who became triumphant in the face of adversity, *Exo 15:20 And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. Exo 15:21 And Miriam answered them, Sing ye to the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.*

Jdg 5:1 Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day, saying, Jdg 5:2 Praise ye the LORD for the avenging of Israel, when the people willingly offered themselves. Jdg 5:3 Hear, O ye kings; give ear, O ye princes; I, even I, will sing unto the LORD; I will sing praise to the LORD God of Israel. Jdg 5:4 LORD, when thou wentest out of Seir, when thou marchedst out of the field of Edom, the earth trembled, and the heavens dropped, the clouds also dropped water. Jdg 5:5 The mountains melted from before the LORD, even that Sinai from before the LORD God of Israel. Jdg 5:6 In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were unoccupied, and the travellers walked through byways. Jdg 5:7 The inhabitants of the villages ceased, they ceased in Israel, until that I Deborah arose, that I arose a mother in Israel. Jdg 5:8 They chose new gods; then was war in the gates: was there a shield or spear seen among forty thousand in Israel? Jdg 5:9 My heart is toward the governors of Israel, that offered themselves willingly among the people. Bless ye the LORD. Jdg 5:10 Speak, ye that ride on white asses, ye that sit in judgment, and walk by the way. Jdg 5:11 They that are delivered from the noise of archers in the places of drawing water, there shall they rehearse the righteous acts of the LORD, even the righteous acts toward the inhabitants of his villages in Israel: then shall the people of the LORD go down to the gates. Jdg 5:12 Awake, awake,

Deborah: awake, awake, utter a song: arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive, thou son of Abinoam. Jdg 5:13 Then he made him that remaineth have dominion over the nobles among the people: the LORD made me have dominion over the mighty. Jdg 5:14 Out of Ephraim was there a root of them against Amalek; after thee, Benjamin, among thy people; out of Machir came down governors, and out of Zebulun they that handle the pen of the writer. Jdg 5:15 And the princes of Issachar were with Deborah; even Issachar, and also Barak: he was sent on foot into the valley. For the divisions of Reuben there were great thoughts of heart. Jdg 5:16 Why abodest thou among the sheepfolds, to hear the bleatings of the flocks? For the divisions of Reuben there were great searchings of heart. Jdg 5:17 Gilead abode beyond Jordan: and why did Dan remain in ships? Asher continued on the sea shore, and abode in his breaches. Jdg 5:18 Zebulun and Naphtali were a people that jeoparded their lives unto the death in the high places of the field. Jdg 5:19 The kings came and fought, then fought the kings of Canaan in Taanach by the waters of Megiddo; they took no gain of money. Jdg 5:20 They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera. Jdg 5:21 The river of Kishon swept them away, that ancient river, the river Kishon. O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength. Jdg 5:22 Then were the horsehoofs broken by the means of the pransings, the pransings of their mighty ones. Jdg 5:23 Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the LORD, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the LORD, to the help of the LORD against the mighty. Jdg 5:24 Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be, blessed shall she be above women in the tent. Jdg 5:25 He asked water, and she gave him milk; she brought forth butter in a lordly dish. Jdg 5:26 She put her hand to the nail, and her right hand to the workmen's hammer; and with the hammer she smote Sisera, she smote off his head, when she had pierced and stricken through his temples. Jdg 5:27 At her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay down: at her feet he bowed, he fell: where he bowed, there he fell down dead. Jdg 5:28 The mother of Sisera looked out at a window, and cried through the lattice, Why is his chariot so long in coming? why tarry the wheels of his chariots? Jdg 5:29 Her wise ladies answered her, yea, she returned answer to herself, Jdg 5:30 Have they not sped? have they not divided the prey; to every man a damsel or two; to Sisera a prey of divers colours, a prey of divers colours of needlework, of divers colours of needlework on both sides, meet for the necks of them that take the spoil? Jdg 5:31 So let all thine enemies perish, O LORD: but let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might. And the land had rest forty years.

1Sa 2:1 And Hannah prayed, and said, My heart rejoiceth in the LORD, mine horn is exalted in the LORD: my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in thy salvation. 1Sa 2:2 There is none holy as the LORD: for there is none beside thee: neither is there any rock like our God. 1Sa 2:3 Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let not arrogancy come out of your mouth: for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed. 1Sa 2:4 The bows of the mighty men are broken, and they that stumbled are girded with strength. 1Sa

2:5 They that were full have hired out themselves for bread; and they that were hungry ceased: so that the barren hath born seven; and she that hath many children is waxed feeble. 1Sa 2:6 The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. 1Sa 2:7 The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up. 1Sa 2:8 He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the LORD'S, and he hath set the world upon them. 1Sa 2:9 He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness; for by strength shall no man prevail. 1Sa 2:10 The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces; out of heaven shall he thunder upon them: the LORD shall judge the ends of the earth; and he shall give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed.

These are War songs, and battle songs. These are not the songs of feeble, weak women, but women who have come to know personally the strengthening of the Lord. Mary's is no different.

Luk 1:46 And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, Luk 1:47 And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. Luk 1:48 For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. Luk 1:49 For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name. Luk 1:50 ***And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation. Luk 1:51 He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. Luk 1:52 He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. Luk 1:53 He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away. Luk 1:54 He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy****; Luk 1:55 As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever*.

It is more than a battle hymn, it is more than Mary's words, it is a prophecy, and it outlines the work of the Gospel. It is Christ in Mary, not just telling her about her blessings but the blessings that will come to you and me. It also anticipates the words of Christ in the Beatitudes, *Luk 6:20 And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said, Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God. Luk 6:21 Blessed are ye that hunger now: for ye shall be filled. Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh. Luk 6:22 Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Luk 6:23 Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets*.

His mercy was surely upon the people who feared Him, the poor, the hungry, the sorrowful, just as it had been said to Abraham all those years ago.

8. The birth of John. *Luke 1:57 - 66*

Luk 1:57 Now Elisabeth's full time came that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son. Luk 1:58 And her neighbours and her cousins heard how the Lord had shewed great mercy upon her; and they rejoiced with her. Luk 1:59 And it came to pass, that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they called him Zacharias, after the name of his father. Luk 1:60 And his mother answered and said, Not so; but he shall be called John. Luk 1:61 And they said unto her, There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name. Luk 1:62 And they made signs to his father, how he would have him called. Luk 1:63 And he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, His name is John. And they marvelled all. Luk 1:64 And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed, and he spake, and praised God. Luk 1:65 And fear came on all that dwelt round about them: and all these sayings were noised abroad throughout all the hill country of Judaea. Luk 1:66 And all they that heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, What manner of child shall this be! And the hand of the Lord was with him.

Mary went from Nazareth to Hebron (we presume) to visit her relative Elizabeth. Elisabeth was in her second trimester (at six months pregnant) and Mary was just pregnant. *Luk 1:36 And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren*. Mary stayed for about three months before she went home, *Luk 1:56 And Mary abode with her about three months, and returned to her own house*. By this I assume that Mary was present at John the Baptist's birth.

Two reasons suggest themselves for this. Firstly it seems pointless to travel home before the birth, and Mary has no pressing reason to go to Nazareth, after all she has spent three months with her cousin and a few weeks would matter little. Secondly, and more importantly, the account of John's birth and circumcision would be seen by Mary, who in turn would report the matter to Luke some fifty or so years later. The two women, both experiencing their first pregnancy would have been a great comfort to each other, bearing in mind that all this time Zacharias had been struck dumb, and could not commune with his wife.

Elisabeth gives birth, without any complications worthy of recording, and on the eight day after prepares her son for circumcision. This was done seven days after she had been ritually impure, *Lev 12:1 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Lev 12:2 Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If a woman have conceived seed, and born a man child: then she shall be unclean seven days;*

according to the days of the separation for her infirmity shall she be unclean. Lev 12:3 And in the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.

It was also the child's naming day. The child entered the covenant and had a name suitable for that covenant, like the new name God gives to us. As was customary, they thought to give him his father's name, Zacharias, but Elisabeth was having none of it. No. she says, his name is John. And after questioning her they turn to Zacharias, who calls for a writing tablet, and confirms, "Hs name is John", and at the moment his tongue is loosed and he spoke, and praised God.

A woman gave birth late in life, a baby was born, his father was healed of what could be interpreted as a stroke, all unusual events, but hardly earth shattering. There must have been other families in the world who had similarly strange providences, and they do not even get a mention. Certainly, these events do not normally produce fear in all who heard them, but this event does, *Luk 1:65 And fear came on all that dwelt round about them: and all these sayings were noised abroad throughout all the hill country of Judaea. Luk 1:66 And all they that heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, What manner of child shall this be! And the hand of the Lord was with him.*

This event must have resonated with the people of Judea, and it must have caused a certain stir and expectation. They were used to disappointment, but they laid these things up in their heart. And of course there was the prophecy of Zacharias which also must have made an impact upon them.

Luk 1:67 And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying, Luk 1:68 Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, Luk 1:69 And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; Luk 1:70 ***As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began****: Luk 1:71 That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; Luk 1:72 To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; Luk 1:73 The oath which he sware to our father Abraham, Luk 1:74 That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, Luk 1:75 In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life. Luk 1:76 And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; Luk 1:77 To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, Luk 1:78 Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, Luk 1:79 To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace*.

This was heavy stuff, it was seditious, revolutionary, nationalist, and no wonder the people "laid it up in their heart". Of the babies born at this time, none are

recorded as coming with such a prophecy. It was to be the new **age of enlightenment**, "*To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death"* as was spoken by the prophet Isaiah*, Isa 9:2 The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.*

It was not however a revolution that would be bloody, it would be peaceful, it would "*guide our feet into the way of peace"*. It was the strangest revolution in history. But think back in time, what had caused this revolution? Why did people need it so much? Because they had walked in **darkness** is the answer. All men walk in darkness

Joh 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. Joh 3:17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. Joh 3:18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. Joh 3:19 And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. Joh 3:20 For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. Joh 3:21 But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.

We have lived in darkness so long that it seems normal to us. It is because evil is present in us that we have become inured to it. You see how that your heart rises up against the thought that you are evil, you do not believe it, and you think that you see good in people? I saw a street preacher talk of the love of God to man and the need for repentance, and the crowd vilified him. We feel our way around this world, trying to guess the form of what we see from touch. We retreat into the dark recesses of our own making, creating little worlds, our own pleasure domes of meaning in a dark cosmos, which remains to us unfathomable. We refuse to look out of the widow, because it is frightening and we turn inward to our imagination for comfort.

"Bread and circuses" (or bread and games) is used to describe a superficial means of appeasement. In the case of politics, the phrase is used to describe the generation of public approval, not through exemplary or excellent public service or public policy, but through diversion; distraction; or the mere satisfaction of the immediate, shallow requirements of a populace, as an offered "palliative." Its originator, the Roman Juvenal, used the phrase to decry the selfishness of common people and their neglect of wider concerns. The phrase also implies the erosion or ignorance of civic duty amongst the concerns of the commoner.

We invent all manner of “bread and circuses” to justify our existence here and to get through life. We fail to hear the words of the preacher while on our way to hell, “vanity of vanity, all is vanity”. I ask you “Christians”, seriously, to give thought to this subject. How much of your time is given to vanities, emptiness, which you choose to have, because it takes you away from thinking about life’s real purpose? You have too much time, yet not enough time. You pass time, you indulge yourself in vanities, you have hobbies, things you do in “spare time”. Ask yourself, will you give these to God as examples of your stewardship here on earth? Or will they be burned along with the lesser works on the bonfire of the vanities? *Col 3:1 If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Col 3:2 Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. Col 3:3 For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.*

No wonder, being blind, we come up with strange ideas to explain our existence. The atoms, unthinking and unguided particles, which have never put a thought together, are by these troglodytes, by the blind men who think they are so clever, given immense powers, by which they become creative gods. They believe atoms have the power to organise themselves and shape themselves, select the best components and make men. All the while being blind. It is a parody of God’s creation and it is absolutely false. And do you know why men follow it? It is because they are blind. Far from being a blind watchmaker, the Creator, The Lord Jesus sees it all too well, and it is the blind man himself who invents the blind watchmaker, to explain what he does not understand, to explain the blindness. Blind leading blind.

They do not see the power of God, *2Th 2:11 And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: 2Th 2:12 That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness*. They are blind and so are you if you do not see this. You are the very people which love darkness and reject Christ, prefer to live in an imaginary world of your own making where you are “god”, *Joh 9:39 And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind. Joh 9:40 And some of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also? Joh 9:41 Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth*.

What caused the blindness and darkness to descend upon man? It was sin. Sin extinguished the light of God in the soul of man, and by this disobedience to God, man became blind. Have you ever thought why Jesus healed the blind? It was to illustrate this very point, that Jesus gives us true vision, to see what our present state is and deliver us from it, *Joh 9:30 "How strange!" the man replied. "He healed my eyes, and yet you don't know where he comes from. Joh 9:31 We know that God listens only to people who love and obey him. God doesn't listen*

to sinners. Joh 9:32 And this is the first time in history that anyone has ever given sight to someone born blind. Joh 9:33 Jesus could not do anything unless he came from God." Joh 9:34 The leaders told the man, "You have been a sinner since the day you were born! Do you think you can teach us anything?" Then they said, "You can never come back into any of our meeting places!" Joh 9:35 When Jesus heard what had happened, he went and found the man. Then Jesus asked, "Do you have faith in the Son of Man?" Joh 9:36 He replied, "Sir, if you will tell me who he is, I will put my faith in him." Joh 9:37 "You have already seen him," Jesus answered, "and right now he is talking with you." Joh 9:38 The man said, "Lord, I put my faith in you!" Then he worshiped Jesus. Joh 9:39 Jesus told him, ***"I came to judge the people of this world. I am here to give sight to the blind and to make blind everyone who can see."*** *Joh 9:40 When the Pharisees heard Jesus say this, they asked, "Are we blind?" Joh 9:41 Jesus answered, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty. But now that you claim to see, you will keep on being guilty."* CEV.

John the Baptist was to be the instigator of God's plan to save His people. The Lord would raise a horn, meaning a powerful person, the horns being the power of the creature to push its opponents, namely Christ who came from the lineage of David. This was no new thing either, because it had been spoken since the creation of the world. It had been spoken of by the prophets, that we should be saved to serve God in peace and it was the covenant oath that He swore to Abraham. *Luk 1:74 That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, Luk 1:75 In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life*. Note that it was not any service that would be acceptable, but one of Holiness, separation to the Lord.

The responsibility for this mission would be laid squarely upon the shoulders of this child carried before the people at his circumcision. He would mark a turning point in the nations history. *Luk 1:76 And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways;* He would grow in stature and become as Elijah. *Mar 9:11 And they asked him, saying, Why say the scribes that Elias must first come? Mar 9:12 And he answered and told them, Elias verily cometh first, and restoreth all things; and how it is written of the Son of man, that he must suffer many things, and be set at nought. Mar 9:13 But I say unto you, That Elias is indeed come, and they have done unto him whatsoever they listed, as it is written of him*.

This identity of John with Elijah directs us back in time to the earlier mission of the prophet, one of the greatest, if not the greatest of all the prophets, who shared a place with Moses at the Transfiguration of Christ. John is like him for many reasons, not the least the time that he lived in. *1Ki 17:1 And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word*. He arrives from "no where" with a message of

drought upon Israel, for all the sins of the nation. His mission is to turn the Nation back to God, and he does. When the rain comes after three years of drought, Elijah defeats the false prophets of Baal and God is the God of Israel, *1Ki 18:36 And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near, and said, LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word*.

There are at least 25 similarities between John and Elijah's life, and you can find out what they were if you are of a mind to study them but I want to look at one seldom mentioned event. It concerns the apparent schizophrenia of Elijah, a split personality, the dualism that sends him from being a tower of strength in 1 Kings chapters 17 – 18, to a weak, quivering wreck of a man in 1 Kings chapter 19. Why does he go from a lone man standing against and defeating 400 false prophets, to a man fleeing for his life from the woman Jezebel?

The same thing happens to John, when he is arrested, and I read the passage in full, *Mat 11:2 Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, Mat 11:3 And said unto him, Art* ***thou he that should come, or do we look for another?*** *Mat 11:4 Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: Mat 11:5 The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. Mat 11:6 And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me. Mat 11:7* ***And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?*** *Mat 11:8 But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. Mat 11:9 But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. Mat 11:10 For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. Mat 11:11 Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. Mat 11:12 And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. Mat 11:13 For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. Mat 11:14 And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come*.

John appears to suffer the same duality of mind that Elijah did. He is the bold preacher, not a reed shaken with the wind, but at the same time he sends his disciples to ask of Jesus, "do we look for another", as if he is questioning all he ever did. As Elijah faced up to Jezebel, John faced Herodius. The women's husband's, Ahab and Herod, were no match for these wicked women, and did whatever they desired, so they posed more of a threat to the prophets. In the

dark stinking dungeon, John's imagination began to increase his fears, and so the disciples were dispatched to Jesus to establish if He was the Christ.

John began to fear and question his path, just as Peter had begun to sink in the waves when he took his eyes off of Jesus and viewed the circumstances instead of looking at Jesus, just as David was afraid of Achish and feigned madness to save his life, just as Jacob was afraid of Esau, and just as Josephs brothers were afraid of him. Fear comes to all men and I think with it this lesson to the faithful in Christ.

Whatever role you have been given in life, it is not because of your innate natural ability that you have been given the role. It is not because you are better or more suited to it than another being, but because God has made you so. God can make a pot and fill it however He will, *2Co 4:7 We are like clay jars in which this treasure is stored. The real power comes from God and not from us*. When God gave talents to the servants it was according to the strength of there ability, but never forget that God gave them that ability. The clay jar that God makes is inconsequential and one is more or less like another. What God fills them with, ah, that is the thing, not what we fill them with?

We are shown by this that Elijah was nothing and John was nothing without God's strength. They received it all from the Lord, just like Paul, *1Co 3:4 For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal? 1Co 3:5 Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? 1Co 3:6 I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. 1Co 3:7 So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase*.

There is no such thing as a great man in the natural. Only a godly man. We will all have times of fear and wavering faith if we forget that all, ALL, is in God's safe hands, and that we are mere vessels, nothing in particular, but made something by Christ.

9. The birth of Jesus. *Luke 2:1 - 7*

Luk 2:1 And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. Luk 2:2 (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) Luk 2:3 And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. Luk 2:4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) Luk 2:5 To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. Luk 2:6 And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be

delivered. Luk 2:7 And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

Augustus (also known as Octavian) was the first emperor of ancient Rome. Augustus came to power after the assassination of Julius Caesar in 44 BC. In 27 BC Augustus "restored" the republic of Rome, though he himself retained all real power as the princeps, or "first citizen," of Rome. The first Emperor was to about to impose tax upon the Lord who owned all of it..

His plan seems ambitious, but "the whole world" Πασαν την οικουμενην, means the whole of that empire. "It is agreed, on all hands, that this cannot mean the whole world, as in the common translation; for this very sufficient reason, that the Romans had not the dominion of the whole earth, and therefore could have no right to raise levies or taxes in those places to which their dominion did not extend. Οικουμενη signifies properly the inhabited part of the earth, from οικεω, to dwell, or inhabit" Adam Clarke. National Geographic records his life.

> "Caesar Augustus was born Gaius Octavius in 63 B.C. His great-uncle was Julius Caesar, who he fought beside in 47 B.C. Augustus impressed his great uncle so much during battle that when Julius Caesar was assassinated in 43 B.C., he had appointed Augustus as heir to his political and personal fortune in his will. Augustus, at the age of 19, accepted the inheritance from Caesar's will and was quickly plunged into the complicated world of Roman politics. He quickly formed strategic alliances, defeated his political rivals, and won a bitterly fought civil war. In 31 B.C. at the Battle of Actium, Augustus won a decisive victory over his rival Mark Antony and his Egyptian fleet.
>
> Returning to Rome, Augustus was acclaimed a hero. With skill, efficiency, and cleverness, he secured his position as the first Emperor of Rome. Augustus claimed he acted for the glory of the Roman Republic, not for personal power. He appealed to Roman citizens by claiming that he led a frugal and modest life.
>
> Augustus reorganized Roman life throughout the empire. He passed laws to encourage marital stability and renew religious practices. He instituted a system of taxation and a census while also expanding the network of Roman roads. He founded a postal service and established a regular police force and fire brigade in Rome. He also instituted an inheritance tax.
>
> Augustus expanded the empire, annexing Egypt, part of Spain, areas of central Europe, and even lands in the Middle East, such as Judea in

A.D. 6. These additions, along with the end of civil wars, fostered the growth of an enormous trading network.

Augustus died outside of Naples, Italy in A.D. 14, 6 miles from Vesuvius, where you recall, the volcano erupted some 65 years later. His body was returned to the capital. Businesses closed the day of his funeral out of deep respect for the emperor. He was a ruler of ability and vision and at his death, Augustus was proclaimed by the Senate to be a Roman god."

As we know all too well, the more services and obligations the government takes upon itself, the greater the burden of taxation. "Tis impossible to be sure of any thing but Death and Taxes", said Christopher Bullock (1716). And the certainty of taxation became a reality under Rome. In fact it led eventually to its fall. This article describes the collapse.

In the terminal collapse of the Roman Empire, there was perhaps no greater burden to the average citizen than the extreme taxes they were forced to pay. The tax 'reforms' of Emperor Diocletian in the 3rd century were so rigid and unwavering that many people were driven to starvation and bankruptcy. The state went so far as to chase around widows and children to collect taxes owed. By the 4th century, the Roman economy and tax structure were so dismal that many farmers abandoned their lands in order to receive public entitlements.

At this point, the imperial government was spending the majority of the funds it collected on either the military or public entitlements. For a time, according to historian Joseph Tainter, "those who lived off the treasury were more numerous than those paying into it." In the 5th century, tax riots and all-out rebellion were commonplace in the countryside among the few farmers who remained. The Roman government routinely had to dispatch its legions to stamp out peasant tax revolts. But this did not stop their taxes from rising.

Valentinian III, who remarked in 444 AD that new taxes on landowners and merchants would be catastrophic, still imposed an additional 4% sales tax… and further decreed that all transactions be conducted in the presence of a tax collector. Under such a debilitating regime, both rich and poor wished dearly that the barbarian hordes would deliver them from the burden of Roman taxation. Zosimus, a late 5th century writer, quipped that "as a result of this exaction of taxes, city and countryside were full of laments and complaints, and all… sought the help of the barbarians.

> Many Roman peasants even fought alongside their invaders, as was the case when Balkan miners defected to the Visigoths en masse in 378. Others simply vacated the Empire altogether. In his book Decadent Societies, historian Robert Adams wrote, "[B]y the fifth century, men were ready to abandon civilization itself in order to escape the fearful load of taxes." Perhaps 1,000 years hence, future historians will be writing the same thing about us. It's not so far-fetched. In the terminal collapse of the Roman Empire, there was perhaps no greater burden to the average citizen than the extreme taxes they were forced to pay.

The burden of taxation will lead civilisations to eventually collapse because you cannot have your cake and eat it.

Was this a tax or preliminary to a tax, a census at the birth of Jesus? Why travel to your own city to be taxed, you could tax men wherever they lived, and they did. One of the most hated professions of the day were publicans, tax collectors. We read "*all went to be taxed, every one into his own city"*. The word tax, ἀπογράφω = apographō, means to "write off", or enrol. Darby translates the verses in, *Luk 2:2 The census itself first took place when Cyrenius had the government of Syria. Luk 2:3 And all went to be inscribed in the census roll, each to his own city:*

I hardly think it sensible that the populace was on the move carrying large sums of money, as they would be easy targets for robbers. So why did they go to there own city? What was so necessary in making people go to their home towns to register? Also note that Mary was to be in the census as well, *Luk 2:4 and Joseph also went up from Galilee out of the city Nazareth to Judaea, to David's city, the which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, Luk 2:5 to be inscribed in the census roll with Mary who was betrothed to him as his wife, she being great with child*. Darby.

Mary was to be enrolled as well as Joseph, showing that she too was a descendant of David, or at least part of David's line, and this event establishes it. I doubt also whether the Romans were philanthropists and did this out of curiosity, a civic duty and for nothing. They would have used the occasion to collect a poll tax, the head tax and also gathered information about populations, wealth distribution, strength of a particular population, and eligibility for army service. It was an intelligence gathering operation.

The Jews tried to trap Jesus over this tax, *Luk 20:22 Is it lawful for us to give tribute unto Caesar, or no? Luk 20:23 But he perceived their craftiness, and said unto them, Why tempt ye me? Luk 20:24 Shew me a penny. Whose image and superscription hath it? They answered and said, Caesar's. Luk 20:25 And he said*

unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's, and unto God the things which be God's.

Whatever the reason Rome decided to have a census, is not clear but they did and that is only part of the story. In the remarkable providence of God, we see the death of Julius Caesar as bearing on the birth of the Messiah. If he had not made the young Augustus his heir, the Roman state might have looked different, the people in authority would be different and their aims different. The census may not have taken place, or if it did at all, it may not have taken place at that time. If Julius Caesar had not caused conflict, Rome would have remained a Republic and not an Empire.

Going back further in time to the prophet Daniel, we see four beast arising in the Earth, from the four Kings who in turn rule over mankind, and it was shown to Nebuchadnezzar in a dream, as a statue with each Kingdom illustrated by a metal. *Dan 2:32 This image's head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, Dan 2:33 His legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay. Dan 2:34 Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces.*

The world kingdoms shown in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, appear to be Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. They are a declining of empires as is seen in the decline in preciousness of the materials that they are made of. Yet they still they have a common purpose, being united in their opposition to the most high God. The final kingdom, the feet of clay of the world kingdoms is struck by the stone made without hands. This is Christ. This is the Kingdom that will prevail.

All through world history, the kingdoms of this world have been fighting Christ and at the same time God has been drawing them to battle. He has, through His providence, worked all things towards this day, the day of the Messiahs birth. All the events of history conspired to meet at the nexus of Bethlehem and the birth of Jesus and nothing was going to stop it. This seemingly insignificant event had repercussions through history, that we begin to see. It was the point at which God entered the world as a man, it was the point that God entered history in a new way, and it marked the beginning of the end of satan's rule.

In the season of sentimental drivel that surrounds the Saviour's birth, Christmas, that makes a mockery of this seminal event, by spreading false cheer, and is a failure to see what God was and is doing. Surrounded by peace and joy, fairy lights, reindeer, presents, turkeys if you can get them, and all manner of man made falsehood, Christmas is the exact antithesis of the birth of Christ. It is the time that we tell gratuitous lies to children about a man who comes down the chimney, it is a time that we have a truce and imagine a world without the evil of man in it, and sing hymns of peace, but it is only for a day.

When God said in His word, "***peace on earth and goodwill to man***", that word does not come to rebels that hate him and reject Him as Lord of their lives. It is not a declaration of peace, when there is no peace. It is not God capitulating to sinful and wicked man, saying I forgive you even if you don't want forgiving.

The birth of Jesus marks the start of the final conflict with man. It is the death knell of satan, the war cry of Christ, the battle hymn of redemption.

The things that Luke writes are held in doubt by some. The unbeliever refuses to accept the historicity of these events. They call Luke a liar and call the whole story into account. Why if he was embroidering the truth did he include events that were not true? The Gospel stands well enough on its own without the events surrounding Christ's birth. John and Mark do not record them. Another thing is, that being near to the occasion, there would have been someone to point out the error to Luke, if he were in error. No the Gospel stands uncorrected.

Whatever you may think about the history of Luke's account of History, and the dates of Augustus and Quirinius, I will not engage in the dispute. I think Luke is right, and he even gives another detailed historical time fix on another event, *Luk 3:1 Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judaea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituraea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene, Luk 3:2 Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness*. That is very precise.

Luke was much nearer the time and he had nothing to gain by lying, forbid the thought. And this is the thing, we think that we are so clever with the bits of history we think know, but so much lies buried and forgotten. History is lost to us. The other week they discovered a Roman settlement on the route of HS2, the high speed rail link.

> The findings offer new insights into life in Britain at around the time that Jesus walked the earth, reports ITV News Senior Correspondent Paul Davies reports. Archaeologists have uncovered an "astounding" set of Roman sculptures while digging on the route of the HS2 high-speed railway. Two complete busts of what appear to be a man and a woman were found at an abandoned medieval church in Stoke Mandeville in Buckinghamshire, along with the head of a child. A hexagonal glass Roman jug was also uncovered with large pieces still intact despite being in the ground for what is believed to be more than 1,000 years.

So much of the ancient records are lost, some will be recovered in time, others are completely lost. Some of the letters from Paul are lost, possibly one to the Ephesian's, *Eph 3:3 How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I* ***wrote afore in few words***, the letter to the Corinthians*, 2Co 2:3 And I wrote this same unto you, lest, when I came, I should have sorrow from them of whom I ought to rejoice; having confidence in you all, that my joy is the joy of you all. 2Co 2:4 For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you,* and the letter to the Laodiceans*, Col 4:16 And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea*.

God knows what He is doing, and if He withhold information or make it plain to see, His purpose stands, and victory comes, and it comes from the Baby born in Bethlehem.

10. Why come to shepherds? *Luke 2:8 - 20*

Luk 2:8 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, ***keeping watch over their flock by night.*** *Luk 2:9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. Luk 2:10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. Luk 2:11* ***For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.*** *Luk 2:12 And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. Luk 2:13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,*
Luk 2:14 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. Luk 2:15 And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. Luk 2:16 And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. Luk 2:17 And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. Luk 2:18 And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. Luk 2:19 But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. Luk 2:20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

Setting aside the bucolic scenes of well dressed shepherds in their traditional headwear, the kaffiyeh, posing reverently, before the angel in a typical Christmas card scene, we must address the real reason this part of the story of Jesus birth is taught to us.

Why is the announcement of the birth to Shepherds at Bethlehem? The King of Kings needs no acknowledgement from the elite rulers of this world, the opinion makers, the intellectuals, the high born, the respectable, the rich and famous, because they are the ones who have damaged God's people. They may have acknowledged Him for whatever reasons, if they were told of His advent, but God kept the news from them. If those people had looked forward to his coming, they would have been expecting Him, wanting Him, anticipating Him and the flags and buntings would have already been put out for Him. A few did expect Him, like the Maggi, Simeon and Ana, but the majority were unaware of His birth. The common man was unaware because his rulers had not taught him to be aware.

The Scripture had made quite clear where His birth was to take place, *Mat 2:4 And when he (Herod) had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. Mat 2:5 And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, Mat 2:6 And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel*.

Just as men did not care about the first coming, so they are careless about His second coming. Christians do not seem to have that keen anticipation of Him. Ask them if they want this life to end and they will tell you, "not yet", they decline attendance at the Lord's table in heaven, *Luk 14:16 Then said he unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: Luk 14:17 And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready. Luk 14:18 And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused.....Luk 14:23 And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. Luk 14:24 For I say unto you,* ***That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper***.

You had better believe it "Christian", because there is no place for you at the table, as long as you live your life for you. As long as you imagine that God works for you, and that He is there to grant your wishes, and that life here is preferable to life in the Kingdom of Heaven. You have not given your life to Him at all.

The angel did not go to **all** of the shepherds in Israel, but only to those in Bethlehem. There must have been hundreds of groups sitting by their flocks in other parts of Israel, who saw nothing but to this group, at Bethlehem, they announced the birth. Were they special shepherds? I don't think so, but they are

typical of the Shepherds of Israel, not the keepers of animals but the keepers of men, *Psa 80:1 To the chief Musician upon Shoshannimeduth, A Psalm of Asaph. Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock; thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth*. That Psalm shows that Christ is the Chief shepherd of Israel.

It is not only the leaders, the elite rulers of this world, the opinion makers, the intellectuals, the high born, the respectable, the rich and famous, that are guilty of neglect, it is also God's religious leaders, who have fallen away from the example of Christ, *Isa 56:10 You leaders of Israel should be watchdogs, protecting my people. But you can't see a thing, and you never warn them. Dozing and daydreaming are all you ever do. Isa 56:11 You stupid leaders are a pack of hungry and greedy dogs that never get enough. You are shepherds who mistreat your own sheep for selfish gain. Isa 56:12 You say to each other, "Let's drink till we're drunk! Tomorrow we'll do it again. We'll really enjoy ourselves."* CEV.

Watching over the flock of Israel, this is the true duty of kings and priests. But they watch not only using their eyes, but God's eyes, and they are directed by the word of God, *Deu 17:18 And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites: Deu 17:19 And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them: Deu 17:20 That his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand, or to the left: to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he, and his children, in the midst of Israel.*

Because they did not keep the words of the Lord, because the words of God had been compromised and eventually lost by the kings of Israel, lost completely by the time of king Josiah, they had also altogether lost their moral compass. The law was found by a chance clear out of the temple at Jerusalem but revival in Israel was a short lived thing and darkness came again on the land. Their religion had degenerated into rituals that had lost their meaning in the word of God over time. It had the effect in the population as well, because they had no spiritual leaders, and their religion declined.

The people became sheep without a shepherd. Ezekiel sees the leaders as butchers not shepherds, greedily feeding off of them, only using the sheep for what they could get from them, not what they could give to them, *Eze 34:7 So, you shepherds, listen to the word of the LORD. Eze 34:8 As I live, declares the Almighty LORD, because there is no shepherd, my sheep have become prey. My sheep have become food for every wild animal. My shepherds haven't searched for my sheep. They have taken care of only themselves, not my sheep. Eze 34:9 So, you shepherds, listen to the word of the LORD. Eze 34:10 This is what the*

Almighty LORD says: I am against the shepherds. I will demand that they hand over my sheep. I won't let them take care of my sheep anymore, and they will no longer take care of only themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, and my sheep will no longer be their food. GW.

This has been the position of many denominations through the history of the Church, power exercised over the people for what they could get from them. The Catholic church did not want the people to have the Bible in the common language of man because they could hide the truth from them. Though relatively few people could read at this time, Wycliffe's idea was to translate the Bible into the vernacular, saying, "it helpeth Christian men to study the Gospel in that tongue in which they know best Christ's sentence".

A number of partial English translations had been made from the 7th century onwards, but the religious ferment caused by Wycliffe's Bible in the late 1300's led to the death penalty for anyone found in unlicensed possession of Scripture in English, though translations were available in all other major European languages. Tyndale said, "I defy the Pope and all his laws [lawes]. If God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy who drives the plough to know more of the Scriptures than you do [said to a priest]".

Tyndale's translation was the first English Bible to draw directly from Hebrew and Greek texts, the first English translation to take advantage of the printing press, the first of the new English Bibles of the Reformation, and the first English translation to use Jehovah ("Iehouah") as God's name as preferred by English Protestant Reformers. In the 1500's, though, translating the Bible into English was controversial at best and dangerous at worst. The Church authorities were terrified of the radical ideas that were coming into England from the Continental Reformers, and judged, quite rightly, that the way to stop these was to keep the Bible firmly in the hands of the priestly class who read Latin.

Tyndale was tried on a charge of heresy in 1536 and was found guilty and condemned to be burned to death, despite Thomas Cromwell's intercession on his behalf. Tyndale "was strangled to death while tied at the stake, and then his dead body was burned". His final words, spoken "at the stake with a fervent zeal, and a loud voice", were reported as "Lord! Open the King of England's eyes". There was a great price to pay for dissent but within four years, four English translations of the Bible were published in England at the king's behest, including Henry's official Great Bible. All were based on Tyndale's work.

The apostles in their day realised this danger and that getting the word out was a dangerous business, but one not to be shirked, *1Pe 5:2 Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; 1Pe 5:3 Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. 1Pe 5:4 And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away*. It

was the duty of NT leaders to have the same obedience to the word as they should have had in the OT.

By coming to the shepherds at Bethlehem, not the rulers, God is making a point that we would do well to consider. That by directing His message to the shepherds of Israel, He is also giving them the right to bear the Gospel, as the true spiritual shepherds should have done, *Luk 2:10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.* The words "good tidings" is in fact the Gospel. "I bring you the Gospel of great joy". Luke writing this must have had it in mind that to the Jews, the first announcement of the Gospel is made by the shepherds. It is the first time it is heard. To the people who dwelt in darkness it is significant.

In the dark night of Israel, those shepherds of Israel were watching over the flock. That is also significant. *1Sa 3:3 And ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was, and Samuel was laid down to sleep; 1Sa 3:4 That the LORD called Samuel: and he answered, Here am I*. Just when Israel was in darkness, in the darkest time of her history, the angel of the Lord appeared, *Luk 2:9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid*. The light burst into the night, into the blackness, and the Gospel was announced. A truly momentous event. Just like at the creation, the light shone out of darkness.

The tabernacle in the wilderness may tell us something else about the shepherds.

The shepherds were living in the fields but at night they would have kept the sheep in a pen. We forget this in our pre-conceived views governed by the pictures of the Christmas story. In the darkness of the night, in the blackness of night, something that we fail to comprehend is these days, they would have little or no light. Blackout was the norm unless the moon shone. It would be extreme folly to let the sheep wander at night, because you would never have seen them. A shepherd would not let the sheep roam at night but would protect them in a sheepfold and position himself between the sheep and anything that would be a predator. *Joh 10:1 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber*.

The tabernacle has something in common with the sheepfold. They both had one door, *Exo 36:37 And he made an hanging for the tabernacle door of blue, and*

purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen, of needlework; Anyone who entered legitimately went in by the door. Of course, you could have entered elsewhere, after all, they were only curtains all the way round. But this person would have been deemed a thief and a robber.

The tabernacle was also a shelter for the people of Israel, *Isa 4:3 And it shall come to pass, that he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, even every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem: Isa 4:4 When the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning. Isa 4:5 And the LORD will create upon every dwelling place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all the glory shall be a defence.* ***Isa 4:6 And there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge****, and for a covert from storm and from rain.*

Jesus makes it quite clear that He is the good shepherd, in His parable of the sheep and shepherd. *Joh 10:11 I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.* He came to the shepherds of Bethlehem to show them he was the Shepherd of the sheep and He even presented Himself in a feeding stall, a manger. Why? Because He was showing symbolically that He is the food of the flock*, Joh 6:50 This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. Joh 6:51 I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.*

The shepherds took the bread of heaven out with them, *Luk 2:17 And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. Luk 2:18 And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds*. These were the first evangelists, the first sowers of the Gospel.

All of the account of Luke is packed with this symbolism. It is a history, but it has a deeper meaning, showing who Christ is and showing that from an early age. From His birth in Bethlehem, we see the outline of who He was to become, gradually being revealed.

11. The Cleansing. *Luke 2:21 - 24*

Luk 2:21 And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb. Luk 2:22 And when the days of her purification

according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord; Luk 2:23 (As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;) Luk 2:24 And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.

Luke does not dwell upon the birth in the same way that Matthew does and Mark and John do not mention it. Although it is a momentous event, it is not given the coverage the "Church" gives it. It is like any other baby born to woman, such that no comment is given, only the joy that comes after in thanksgiving to the Lord, *Joh 16:21 A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world*.

It is made something more for men, it is made into a mass, a celebration of the Eucharist, and a feast which last the whole 12 days until January the 6th. It is a feast which men celebrate more than the death of the Lord, although Easter is fixed in the way it always has been, through the lunar calendar, the big festival of Christmas has no agreed date. What is the history of Christmas?

> Various factors contributed to the selection of December 25th as a date of celebration: it was the date of the winter solstice on the Roman calendar and it was nine months after March 25th, the date of the vernal equinox and a date linked to the conception of Jesus (celebrated as the Feast of the Annunciation). But we have no records that definitively give us a date.
>
> Christmas played a role in the Arian controversy of the fourth century. After this controversy ran its course, the prominence of the holiday declined for a few centuries. The feast regained prominence after 800 when Charlemagne was crowned emperor on Christmas Day.
>
> In Puritan England, Christmas was banned as it was associated with drunkenness and other misbehaviour. It was restored as a legal holiday in England in 1660, but remained disreputable in the minds of many people. In the early 19th century, Christmas festivities and services became widespread with the rise of the Oxford Movement in the Church of England that emphasized the centrality of Christmas in Christianity and charity to the poor, along with Washington Irving, Charles Dickens, and other authors emphasizing family, children, kind-heartedness, gift-giving, and Santa Claus (for Irving), or Father Christmas (for Dickens).
>
> Christmas does not appear on the lists of festivals given by the early Christian writers Irenaeus and Tertullian. Origen and Arnobius fault the

pagans for celebrating birthdays, which suggests that Christmas was not celebrated in their time. Arnobius wrote after AD 297. The Chronograph of 354 AD records that a Christmas celebration took place in Rome in 336 AD, eight days before the calends (that is, the first day of the month in the ancient Roman calendar) of January.

In the East, the birth of Jesus was celebrated in connection with the Epiphany on January 6th. This holiday was not primarily about the nativity, but rather the baptism of Jesus. Christmas was promoted in the East as part of the revival of Orthodox Christianity that followed the death of the pro-Arian Emperor Valens at the Battle of Adrianople in 378. The feast was introduced in Constantinople in 379 AD, in Antioch by John Chrysostom towards the end of the fourth century, probably in 388 AD, and in Alexandria in the following century.

A mosaic in “Mausoleum M” in the pre-fourth-century necropolis under St Peter's Basilica in Rome, interpreted by some as Jesus represented as Christus Sol (Christ the Sun). December 25th was the date of the winter solstice in the Roman calendar. A late fourth-century sermon by Saint Augustine explains why this was a fitting day to celebrate Christ's nativity: "Hence it is that He was born on the day which is the shortest in our earthly reckoning and from which subsequent days begin to increase in length. He, therefore, who bent low and lifted us up chose the shortest day, yet the one whence light begins to increase."

Linking Jesus to the Sun was supported by various Biblical passages. Jesus was considered to be the "Sun of righteousness" prophesied by Malachi: "Unto you shall the sun of righteousness arise, and healing is in his wings." Such solar symbolism could support more than one date of birth. An anonymous work known as De Pascha Computus linked the idea that creation began at the spring equinox, on March 25th, with the conception or birth (the word nascor can mean either) of Jesus on March 28th, the day of the creation of the sun in the Genesis account. One translation reads: "O the splendid and divine providence of the Lord, that on that day, the very day, on which the sun was made, March 28th, a Wednesday, Christ should be born".

In the 17th century, Isaac Newton, who, coincidentally, was born on December 25th, argued that the date of Christmas may have been selected to correspond with the solstice. Conversely, according to Steven Hijmans of the University of Alberta, "It is cosmic symbolism ... which inspired the Church leadership in Rome to elect the southern solstice, December 25th, as the birthday of Christ, and the northern solstice as that of John the Baptist, supplemented by the equinoxes as their respective dates of conception."

Now here is a strange thing, that Jesus birth is not mentioned anywhere else in the NT. It was not given to the church as something to be celebrated by an annual remembrance or festival and the early church did not have a celebration of Christmas. Looking in the sacred record, neither is Easter celebrated. Some early Christians chose to celebrate the resurrection of Christ on the same date as the Jewish Passover, which fell around day 14 of the month of Nisan, in March or April. These Christians were known as Quartodecimans (the name means "Fourteeners"). In this regard, when did the Church begin celebrating Easter? The earliest recorded observance of an Easter celebration comes from the 2nd century, though the commemoration of Jesus' Resurrection probably occurred earlier.

We see that the two big festivals of Christianity have no foundation in Christianity only in tradition. They are totally inventions of man. Why is this? Men like to control the people of God and even God Himself. Because many of them do not know Him, they try control the earthly events surrounding Him. *Col 2:8 Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ*.

I think one reason is that we do not have Easter and Christmas as festivals is because Jesus gave a memorial of his death, not Easter, but the Lord's table. This was important to Him and should be to us. It is a celebration, a remembrance of His death, but at the same time looking forward to his coming, *1Co 11:25 After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood:* ***this do ye****, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. 1Co 11:26* ***For as often*** *as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come*.

It was not a yearly feast but an, "**as often**" feast, not having a special day or time to celebrate it, but whenever you feel like it, do it, feast. Not a legal feast, compulsory or Sunday worship feast, or a feast to be controlled and the elements, bread and wine, regulated by the church leaders, but by "you". It is given to YOU, the ordinary people in the church, it is given to the congregation, not just to the elders, to celebrate with joy the "death and coming" of the Lord. I think that people who do not participate in this celebration of the table, should give some thought as to the reasons why they do not participate, when Jesus suggested it to them but He did not even mention Christmas and Easter, which they celebrate.

Why do people celebrate it? The pressure of the media, group pressure, is one reason, trying to get you to buy more under the pretext of Christmas. But I think that nostalgia plays a big role. The uncertain future is absolutely certain for the believer, but the non-believer is looking back not forward. His only certainty is

the past and that he cannot change. He remembers it with a sigh through the rose tinted lenses of nostalgia.

Jesus was accordingly circumcised the 8th day after His birth, not according to the law of Moses but according to the law given to Abraham, *Gen 17:11 And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you*.....*Act 7:8 And he gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs*.

Who did the circumcising? Any one could, and as we have said elsewhere the massive task of circumcising the men who entered the Promised Land was undertaken by the women. It required skill, so I imagine that it fell to the people with the most experience of doing it. Ultimately it fell to the Rabbis but they were only special in virtue of the skill they possessed.

Luk 2:22 And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord; "Bible verses rarely read on Sunday", says of this verse:

> This is just another example of bizarre laws in the bible. It also provides another example of how the Bible values women as much less worthy as men. There is no logic or reason behind either of these laws. There is especially no reason why giving birth to a girl makes a woman twice as unclean as giving birth to a boy.

This is just the sort of shallow comment you would expect from an unbeliever. You cannot understand it so accordingly, you trash it, and you show your own ignorance. The Bible does value women or it would not go into such detail of the woman's cleansing.

What are the days of purification and what does this section of Scripture teach us? It is taken from the law given in Leviticus, *Lev 12:1 The LORD spoke to Moses, Lev 12:2 "Tell the Israelites: When a woman gives birth to a boy, she will be unclean for seven days. This is the same number of days she is unclean for her monthly period. Lev 12:3 The boy must be circumcised when he is eight days old. Lev 12:4 Then she must stay at home for 33 days in order to be made clean from her bleeding. She must not touch anything holy or go into the holy place until the days needed to make her clean are over. Lev 12:5 "When a woman gives birth to a girl, she will be unclean as in her monthly period. However, she will be unclean for two weeks. Then she must stay at home for 66 days in order to be made clean from her bleeding. Lev 12:6 "When the days needed to make her clean are over, she must bring a one-year-old lamb for a burnt offering and a pigeon or a mourning dove as an offering for sin. She must bring them to the priest at the entrance to the tent of meeting.* GW.

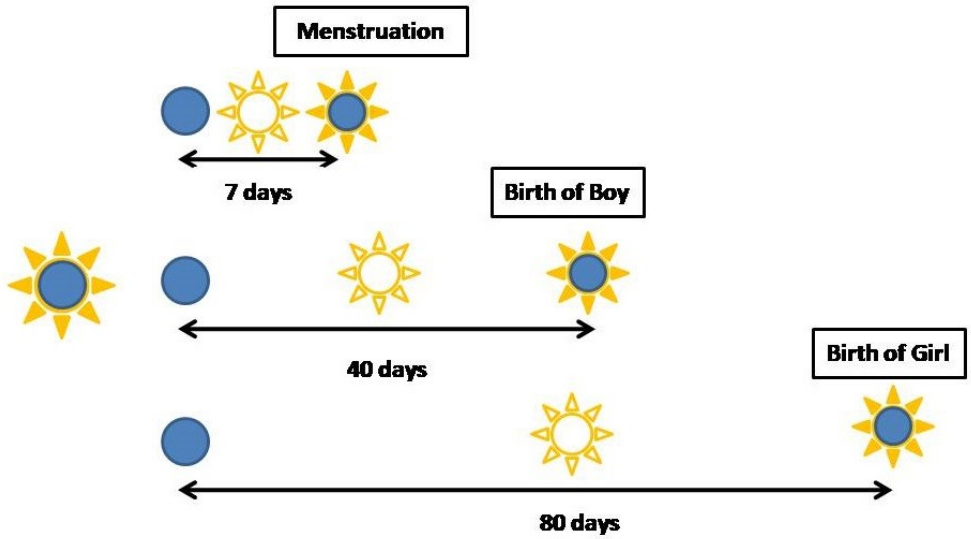
This law did not appear until the Mosaic law, when God began to show more detail, albeit in types, His Son and the requirements of fellowship. Sin moved men away from God, purity brought them close, sin separated, righteousness and holiness reconciled. Blood was sacred, *Gen 9:4 But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat. Gen 9:5 And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man. Gen 9:6 Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man*.

This law pre-dated Moses and it is symbolic of *Christ, Joh 6:54 Whoso* ***eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood****, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. Joh 6:55 For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. Joh 6:56 He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him*. This is the only blood you must take to have life. All other blood is tainted with the curse except Jesus blood. That is, I think why we have the law on "blood".

The woman giving birth to the child, sheds blood, and her own blood defiles her. She can though, be reconciled to God. If it is a baby girl, it is a period of 14 + 66 days of separation, over 11 weeks of purification or reconciling, and a very long time to be separated from God. If it is a boy, it is a period of 7 + 33 days separation from God, nearly 6 weeks.

According to WebMD:

> Normally, your due date is 280 days (40 weeks or about 10 months -- also known as 10 lunar months) from the first day of your last period. However, if your periods are not regular or are not 28 days apart, your due date may be different from the "280-day rule."



This would imply that the woman missed 10 periods during her pregnancy, or 10 periods of 8 days (including the day of her sacrifice), 80 days in all, of the time of purifications. She may have forgotten but the Lord did not forget and so she had to go through the process of cleansing. There is a precedent for this, *2Ch 36:21 To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years. .....Lev 26:34 Then shall the land enjoy her sabbaths, as long as it lieth desolate, and ye be in your enemies' land; even then shall the land rest, and enjoy her sabbaths. Lev 26:35 As long as it lieth desolate it shall rest; because it did not rest in your sabbaths, when ye dwelt upon it*.

The people may have neglected the land Sabbath, a year every seven years, but God did not. For 490 years the Israelites had failed to observe it, but God had not forgotten. The 70 Sabbaths were going to be celebrated whether they liked or not and to ensure the land rested they were put into captivity.

Why was the boy half of the time for cleansing the mother, than a girl. The girl carries the next generation with her, in her ovaries, so this is a possible reason, the girl was twice as unclean. Or it may be related to the sin of Eve, *1Ti 2:14 And it was not Adam who was deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and broke God's law*. Whatever the reason, the woman is impure longer for giving birth to a daughter.

The child was not affected by the mother's blood. The baby is never declared unclean. It was never the baby at fault, it was the parent. *Luk 2:23 As it is written in the law of the Lord: Every male opening the womb shall be called holy to the Lord:*

This leaves the question of Mary, and was she clean or unclean by the shedding of blood? Mary was both a sinner and unclean. I say this with the sadness becoming my own self, for I am a sinner. There is nothing triumphant in declaring the mother of Jesus a sinner, as if we, as fish wives picking her life apart, could ever come close to her in honour. We all wallow in that filth of sin until we are saved by Christ and we are all mortal beings. The amazing thing about Jesus birth is that he trusted Himself to her care and she was worthy of that trust.

It is not only Roman catholic to declare the words of the angel, *Luk 1:28 Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women*. Mary was the greatest of all women. As Eve gave birth and brought sin upon all, so Mary gave light and life to the world. All hail Mary.

We must get out of the habit of making Mary a doctrine, and seeing her as a person, flesh and blood, the mother of Christ.

12. The man who could not die. *Luke 2:22 - 24*

Luk 2:22 And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord; Luk 2:23 (As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;) Luk 2:24 And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.

Mary did not think that she was absolved of offering the sacrifices ordained by law just because she carried the Lord's Son. She was obedient to the law, *Lev 12:6 And when the days of her purifying are fulfilled, for a son, or for a daughter, she shall bring a lamb of the first year for a burnt offering, and a young pigeon, or a turtledove, for a sin offering, unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, unto the priest: Lev 12:7 Who shall offer it before the LORD, and make an atonement for her; and she shall be cleansed from the issue of her blood. This is the law for her that hath born a male or a female. Lev 12:8 And if she be not able to bring a lamb, then she shall bring two turtles, or two young pigeons; the one for the burnt offering, and the other for a sin offering: and the priest shall make an atonement* ***for her****, and she shall be clean*.

Mary's obedience to Scripture is a lesson to us all. It does not mean that however close to God you feel you are, you become exempt from doing His will. You men, who think that you are exempt from leading the Church because you think that a new age requires new rules, are mistaken. You women who fail to cover your hair but take the lead in worship are mistaken. We must all go back and take a long hard look at that little Jewish girl and ask ourselves why we are disobedient in the face of her obedience.

Mary could have argued poverty for not offering a sacrifice. Like so many people, religious obligation and circumstances come upon them suddenly and they are unprepared. They do not make provision for future circumstances which they have parachuted themselves into. Mary, out of her poverty could just about rise to sacrifice a dove, but you can bet your boots that she did not want to be a bad mother to God's son, so she prepared for the event early. It is one of the many sacrifices a parent makes that are not seen by the child.

I wonder if the Lord had Mary in mind when He observed the widow casting in to the treasury, her all, her life*, Luk 21:1 And he looked up, and saw the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury. Luk 21:2 And he saw also a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites. Luk 21:3 And he said, Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all: Luk 21:4 For all these*

have of their abundance cast in unto the offerings of God: but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had. I think Jesus thought often about Mary and the sacrifices and sorrows that would befall her. He knew the future but would not protect her from it, just as He would not protect Himself, but He would be with her every step of the way. She must live the life of a mortal in this valley of tears, but what a reunion when they meet in the Glory of God.

Another soul was being prepared for Glory, even while Mary sacrificed her offerings, *Luk 2:25 And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. Luk 2:26 And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ.* He was **the man who could not die,** not yet, not before he had seen Him and his name was Simeon.

This singular honour, of knowing when you will die, or roughly when, is a blessing and a curse. The curse is that people would take advantage of that knowledge to do all manner of evil things before coming to the Lord, and asking forgiveness at the end, you would suppose. They would try and get that "death bed repentance", in the hope of life, but I do not find examples in Scripture except possibly the robber crucified with Christ. The fact that you would do such a thing and live wickedly, implies that your heart is not right with God and why would it ever be right?

You are not in a state where you can be morally neutral, and that you can switch loyalties at a whim. You are wicked, *Jer 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?* You cannot even know your own heart it is so despairingly wicked. It would be a dangerous game to play with God, to think you can repent at will and change sides.

The blessing on the other hand, is that the righteous man who knows his day of death, will count his days precious and prepare for that day he meets his Lord*, Psa 90:12 So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.* Doctor Thomas Chalmers, had said that it was greatly to be desired that before death that Christians have time to prepare. . . time to disengage themselves, time to withdraw from the busyness. . . that so occupies them, and that if we live three score years and ten, and if we reach the seventh decade, that decade should be like a Sabbath, a preparation for heaven.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, 'I agree with Chalmers absolutely. We don't give enough time to death and to going on, it is a very strange thing this. Death is the one certainty, and yet we don't think about it. We are too busy. We just allow life and circumstances so to occupy us but we don't stop and think. I am grateful to God that I have been given this time. People say about sudden death that it is a wonderful way to go, but I have come to the conclusion that that is quite wrong. I

think the way we go out of this world is very important. The hope of sudden death is based upon the fear of death. It is the hope of wanting to slip through death *rather than to face it*.'

I (MW) used to pray to go quickly, the coward's death if you will, until I read that. I have only one physical death to go through and it is the last enemy. I should face it as if it were just that, a sworn enemy, and stand up to the thing that has power of death, satan, *Heb 2:14 Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; Heb 2:15 And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage*.

Christ has delivered me, so what have I to fear, except fear. I must receive whatever way Christ should choose to take me, with good grace, not seeking to avoid it but gratefully accepting the will of the Lord. The death of Bonhoeffer greatly impressed me when I read it, and the calm with which he faced it. Here is an account from the book by Eric Metaxas:

> The camp doctor at Flossenbürg was H. Fischer-Hüllstrung. He had no idea whom he was watching at the time, but years later, he gave the following account of Bonhoeffer's last minutes alive: On the morning of that day between five and six o'clock the prisoners, among them Admiral Canaris, General Oster, General Thomas and Reichgeritsrat Sack were taken from their cells, and the verdicts of the court martial read out to them.
>
> Through the half-open door in one room of the huts I saw Pastor Bonhoeffer, before taking off his prison garb, kneeling on the floor praying fervently to his God. I was most deeply moved by the way this lovable man prayed, so devout and so certain that God heard his prayer. At the place of execution, he again said a short prayer and then climbed the steps to the gallows, brave and composed. His death ensued after a few seconds. In the almost fifty years that I worked as a doctor, I have hardly ever seen a man die so entirely submissive to the will of God. Bonhoeffer thought it the plain duty of the Christian—and the privilege and honour—to suffer with those who suffered. He knew that it was a privilege to be allowed by God to partake of the sufferings of the Jews who had died in this place before him. According to Schlabrendorff, the crematorium at Flossenbürg was not working, so the bodies of the men hanged that morning were burned in piles, and in this, too, he had the honour to be joined to the millions of other victims of the Third Reich.

We all have a death sentence upon us but the triumph is that the devil even loses that battle, his last grasp of mortal man, thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ.

For Simeon, he had not reached the gallows of life but he had reached the first step. His only prayer was, "that I may see Christ". What thought and meditation had gone before this prayer. He must have read or heard the psalm of Asaph, and taken it to heart, *Psa 73:24 Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Psa 73:25 Whom have I in heaven but thee? and* ***there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee****. Psa 73:26 My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever*.

Some men think it is good to be surrounded by friends and relatives on one's deathbed, the "dead" surrounding you, trying to comfort you. No, I say. If you get to your deathbed and need comfort, you are in a wretched state. You cannot say with Asaph, "*there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee*". There is one and only one person you want as the curtain drops on life and that is Christ. Some will not see Him and it is from the frying pan into the fire, *Luk 16:22 And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; Luk 16:23 And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom*. All the grieving souls at the deathbed will be left wondering where the life has gone, without Christ, until their turn comes to die.

These and many other thoughts passed through Simeon's mind, as day after day he was grieved at the way men were going on the earth, and through his tears he cried out to God in despair, for the Hope of Israel*, Jer 17:13 O LORD, the hope of Israel, all that forsake thee shall be ashamed, and they that depart from me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the LORD, the fountain of living waters.*

Did this hope come in early life or later life for Simeon? Probably later, as he grew to see the important things of life. We are by our very nature born in sin and selfishness, caring for ourselves, not really thinking of others. As we grow older and see more through Christ's eyes, we begin to alter our perspective on life. It becomes a sad world, a wicked world that will not see the true value of life.

In the last few weeks I have watched men passionately debating the issues of COP 26, the climate conference, and to many there is not a greater existential threat to mankind. I have seen men and women involved in many causes over the years, passionately and sincerely debating their cause. Yet none of them ever get to the root of the problem, while pushing their world view. The real problem is man and the sin that so easily besets him. Man the self-righteous, never for a minute thinking that it might be his nature which causes the problem,

the blind leading the blind towards the next problem. They are the people described as, *2Ti 3:7 Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.*

Do you see God tackling these problems, brought up by men, important as they may be, sending His Son to solve this earth's seeming troubles, for example, like climate variability, like Covid? No, God takes the first and foremost problem of mankind, sin, and from that base, every problem has a chance of a solution. He goes straight to the root cause of man's ills and creates the solution, Christ and His death for sin and His triumph over it. That is what these organisations should be tackling Globally, the infection of everybody with sin. If they saw that, the greed, avarice, vice, pride, envy, wrath, anger, sloth, gluttony, lust, among their many other vices, summed up as sin, this would be the agenda. Paul says the same to Timothy, it is the lack of godliness which is the problem, *2Ti 3:1 This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. 2Ti 3:2 For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, 2Ti 3:3 Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, 2Ti 3:4 Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God*; If they saw the moral dimension, then the other issues could be tackled on a much more secure foundation.

Simeon had arrived at this point in his life and thoughts and saw the Saviour as the only solution to life's ills. The Spirit had informed him that he would not die until he had seen the salvation of God. Whether that was an additional blessing to him is not clear, because he knew by then, that the Messiah was coming and to be with his Lord was to be delayed. It was delayed so that he could tell mankind about it.

He is a bit like Methuselah, whose name means, "when he dies it shall come". Methuselah died in the year of the great flood. His relatives must have watched his health carefully knowing that something tremendous would happen when he departed. Simeon too knew this, something great would happen to the world when he departed. He saw Jesus and took the baby in his arms, blessed God and uttered the famous words:

Luk 2:28 Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Luk 2:29 Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: Luk 2:30 For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Luk 2:31 Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; Luk 2:32 A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.

Jesus was to be the Saviour of the gentiles, a light to lighten them, and He was the Gory of Israel. But how many people took this message to heart and did it change the expectation of Israel? The people had to wait half a lifetime for Jesus

to become active, 30 long years for these events to become blurred and lost to the memory. Many like Simeon would die and there would be fewer who remembered these acts of God.

Where was the impact of these things? There was no “cult of the infant”, a movement of the people anticipating the Messiah, Herod did not hear about it or else he would have killed the children in Jerusalem as well, the people did not follow the baby Messiah back to Nazareth and worship Him there, and to all intents the memory of His nativity are gone. There was a hope but it faded from memory with the fading star of Bethlehem.

We are in a position similar to those people in the first century. The Lord of Heaven delays His return, but know this, it is the uncertainty of His second coming that is the assurance of His coming, for the Scripture says, *Mat 24:43 But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Mat 24:44 Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.*

It may be self-indulgent to set aside time for dying, when we should live our lives as if it were our last moment, to die in harness. It may be better for others, if you continue to do what God has given you to do, realising that this life is itself a preparation for death. The inquest is for the dead not for the living. But we must be ready to go and to this end it is good to be in a state of repentance.

Some people never ever admit that they are wrong, they never say sorry, least of all to the Lord. But if you are in a state of repentance, then you will be ready to go, *Luk 18:13 And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. Luk 18:14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted*.

Pray for the coming of the Lord and watch thereunto with prayer.

13. The price of bearing the Messiah. *Luke 2:33 - 38*

Luk 2:33 And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him. Luk 2:34 And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; Luk 2:35 (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed. Luk 2:36 And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of

Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; Luk 2:37 And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. Luk 2:38 And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

Simeon and his sister in the faith, Anna, had some words to say to Mary about this infant and we shall hear them today. Firstly we read, "*this is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel*". The word "child" is not in the original and has been supplied by the translator. I think we should use "this one", because He will fully undertake His work as a man. As a man He will cause many people in Israel to stumble and fall, *Isa 8:13 Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. Isa 8:14 And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Isa 8:15 And many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken. Isa 8:16 Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples*.

You will notice that what is attributed to the Lord, to Jehovah, in the OT, is attributed to Jesus in the NT, and this is further proof that He is God, *1Pe 2:5 Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. 1Pe 2:6 Wherefore also it is contained in the Scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. 1Pe 2:7 Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, 1Pe 2:8 And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed*.

You may have thought that Jesus came to save everyone without exception, but these verses do not say that. He was to many, a stumbling stone and a rock of offence. Even His own family were offended in Him for a time, *Mar 6:3 Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him*. Those members of His family came to see Him, for what He was and eventually they became pillars of the Church. So some of the people fell and rose again, rubbing their shins having fallen at the rock of offence.

Jesus bought war to men, *Mat 10:34 Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. Mat 10:35 For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. Mat 10:36 And a man's foes shall be they of his own household*. Jesus threshed Israel. A threshing sledge was

used, made of wood with sharp stones placed in the bottom. The sledge was pulled around and around over stalks of wheat or barley to cut the stalks into small pieces. The sledge was pulled by oxen or another animal. A young man, with perhaps some weights would be placed on top of the sledge to make it more efficient. The process of salvation is like winnowing and involves separating wheat from chaff. It is a painful process whereby we are changed into a new creature.

It does not say that Jesus would raise **ALL** Israel, "*Behold, this one is set for the fall and rising again of **many** in Israel*". Many of the Jews, as a result of not seeing the truth in Jesus, would perish but many would be saved. At the resurrection of Christ, there is no more a Jew and no more a Gentile in Him but all ONE in Christ. They would no longer exist as different peoples, there would be no cultural barriers, there would be no ethnic barriers, there would be no gender barriers, no higher and lower orders in Jesus' society. There would be no Temple on earth, everything would be seen in terms of the Kingdom of Heaven, *Rev 21:22 And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.* But this is in the near future for the Christ child.

The Scripture goes on to say that this Jesus would be, "*for a sign which shall be spoken against; that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed*". There is a parenthesis, brackets, inserted here saying, "(*Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also*)", and it is a comment that divides the flow of what is being said by Luke. It divides the sentence Luke is talking about and if we are not careful we will lose the meaning of the verse. It should read, "*for a sign which shall be spoken against; that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed* ".

Jesus would be a sign and He would be spoken against, contradicted, so that the hearts of men would be revealed. His life on earth would be a sign. A definition of a sign is, "an object, quality, or event whose presence or occurrence indicates the probable presence or occurrence of something else",a warning put up and advising of a danger. It says that this sign, Jesus, would not be heeded, in fact men would speak against it.

How would Jesus become a sign and what would He signal? Pilgrim's Progress is a good illustration of what He would signal,

> Then said Evangelist, "If this be thy condition, why standest thou still?" He answered, "Because I know not whither to go." Then he gave him a parchment roll, and there was written within, "Fly from the wrath to come."
>
> The man therefore read it, and looking upon Evangelist very carefully, said, "Whither must I fly?" Then said Evangelist, (pointing with his finger over a very wide field,) "Do you see yonder wicket-gate?" The

> man said, “No.” Then said the other, “Do you see yonder shining light?” He said, “I think I do.” Then said Evangelist, “Keep that light in your eye, and go up directly thereto, so shalt thou see the gate; at which, when thou knockest, it shall be told thee what thou shalt do.” So I saw in my dream that the man began to run. Now he had not run far from his own door when his wife and children, perceiving it, began to cry after him to return; but the man put his fingers in his ears, and ran on crying, Life! life! eternal life! So he looked not behind him, but fled towards the middle of the plain.

Jesus stood as a finger post directing the way to God. He laid it out clearly and concisely, as did John.
Mat 23:29 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, Mat 23:30 And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Mat 23:31 Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. Mat 23:32 Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Mat 23:33 Ye serpents, ye ***generation of vipers****, how can ye escape the damnation of hell? ……..Luk 3:7 Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O* ***generation of vipers****, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Luk 3:8 Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. Luk 3:9 And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire*.

Do you believe that? That you are a viper, in need of warning, and who has warned you to “*flee from the wrath to come*“? We do not like to admit to being a viper, a malignant and spiteful person, a false and treacherous person. No, that is not me and I resent you calling me that, in fact if you wanted me to listen to you and your God, you would not call me that. I am not that bad, certainly not a viper. But that is exactly what God had called you. He wants you to see what you are like in His eyes, and if you see it there is hope. He does not do virtue signalling but signalling the truth. This is Jesus the Sign, and if we do not take heed to what He says, we are lost.

Of course you may fool the Church of England into thinking that you have become a “Christian”, in order to gain entry into Britain, like the Muslim who blasted the Liverpool hospital with a bomb. But you cannot fool the Lord and gain entrance to heaven. You can fool people into thinking you are a Christian and you can even fool yourself, but you do not fool God, *1Co 10:8 Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. 1Co 10:9 Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. 1Co 10:10 Neither murmur ye, as*

some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. 1Co 10:11 Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. 1Co 10:12 Wherefore ***let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall***.

Jesus came to stand in the highway of life to give directions. What amazes me is that He would ever want to save us. What have we ever done for Him except use His name as a swear word. We have done absolutely nothing good that deserves His kindness, in fact we have done the opposite. It may have been better for the Lord to say, enough, I will wipe the slate clean and put this memorial upon humanity, that human beings are worthless sinners, everyone single one of them. But He did not, and wonder of wonders, He showed amazing love, as Charles Wesley said:

> And can it be that I should gain
> An int'rest in the Saviour's blood?
> Died He for me, who caused His pain?
> For me, who Him to death pursued?
> Amazing love! how can it be
> That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

But He did not save them that they should continue in their ways of sin. He saved them to change them. In their darkness, He came to His enemies and saved them, *Rom 5:6 For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. Rom 5:7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. Rom 5:8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us*. That is love and people who reject that love are worthy of death. The sign which would be spoken against, by Israel, would in turn reveal many thoughts, "*that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed"*

He then refurbished us, renewed us, cleansed us, *1Co 5:7 Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us*: You have never lived life until you have Christ in it, you are on the outside of life, grubbing around for meaning, but never finding it.

I cannot say the Mary had a grasp of all this yet, and it would be like a dagger in the heart when it did come, *Luk 2:35 Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also*. Although Jesus suffered terrible injuries and death, His mother would also suffer. There was no special favour shown to her, no palliative in her suffering, it was all too real and she must go through it. Why did she have to suffer? It shows to us the real humanity of this young Jewish girl, that she was like us, feeling with every sense that God gave her, developing her character

with every joyful moment and every sorrow, until she too had become what God wanted her to be.

Scarcely had Simeon spoken than at that instant, or hour, this very old lady, Anna came forward and gave thanks as well, *Luk 2:36 And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; Luk 2:37 And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. Luk 2:38 And she coming in* ***that instant*** *gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem*.

There is considerable detail about Anna, and she must have impressed Mary, who records details of her life. Do you remember people from years ago and what impressed you so much about them? The detail is incredible and inspired. Anna or Hannah, was the barren mother who gave birth to a miracle baby, Samuel, who she dedicated to the service of God.

Anna was a prophetess and a daughter of Phanuel, according to the Septuagint or Penuel, meaning the face of God. Jacob gave this name to the place where he saw God face to face. *Gen 32:30 And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved*. This daughter of Penuel had also seen the face of God and her life was preserved. *Joh 1:14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth*.

Called after the mother of Samuel, Anna's had lived to a great age. This is another thing that we quickly pass over. She had lived with her husband seven years from her virginity, so supposing she was very young when she married, the same age as Mary, that would make her about 21 years old when she was widowed,. She was 84 years in the temple, and would be well over 100 years old, being born at the end of the 2nd century BC. This was a period of great change in Galilee and Judea.

Alexander Jannaeus (103–76 BC) was the first of the Maccabean priestly princes to style himself king on his coins, which bore his name and title in Greek as well as Hebrew . Alexander Yannai (Jannaeus) was the Hasmonean ruler of Judea son of John Hyrcanus; was high priest and king. According to Josephus, Yannai was hated by his father and for this reason was forced to spend his childhood in Galilee. When his eldest brother, Aristobulus, inherited the high priesthood from their father, he was imprisoned together with other brothers and his mother for fear they would attempt to seize power. Upon the death of Aristobulus, his widow, Salome Alexandra, designated Yannai as the successor, and the new high priest married his sister-in-law, in accordance with the Jewish rite of levirate.

Jannaeus was responsible, you recall, for shifting a large part of the population from Judah to Galillee.

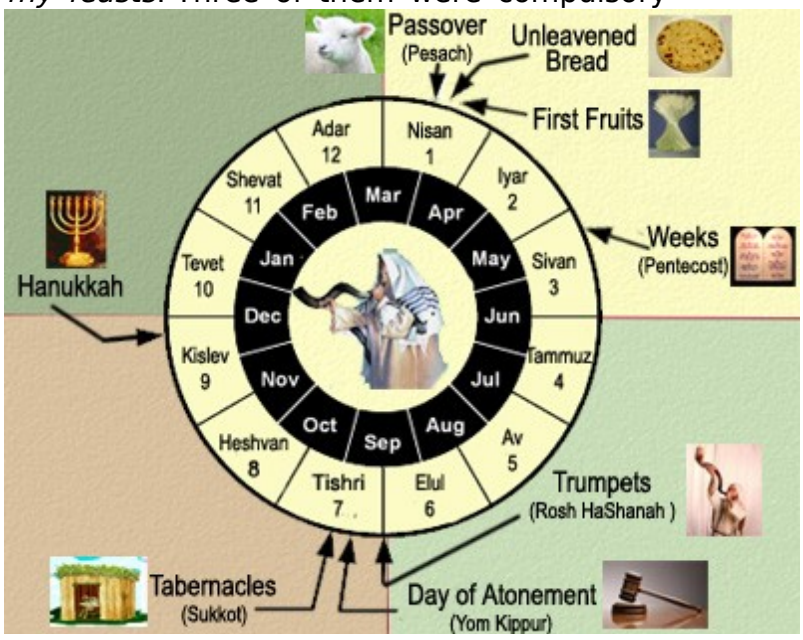
Anna was of the lost tribe of Asher. “Though this tribe was carried captive with the rest of the ten tribes; yet there were some of the ten tribes that returned along with Judah and Benjamin, and were dispersed among them. This tribe had its seat in Galilee; so that though the Jews denied that any prophet came from thence, yet it seems a prophetess did.” Dr Gill.

This was a godly woman and I think she had been waiting all those years for this moment. Waiting through a period of turbulent history perhaps with some moments of despair and at other times great anticipation. Now the time had come. Now do you see why Mary recalled this great person? She was worth remembering.

14. Jesus comes to the Temple. *Luke 2:39 - 42*

Luk 2:39 And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth. Luk 2:40 And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him. ***L****uk 2:41 Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover. Luk 2:42 And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast*.

The feasts of Israel were given to Israel as times of rejoicing, *Lev 23:1 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,* ***Lev 23:2*** *Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, Concerning the feasts of the LORD, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, even these are my feasts*. Three of them were compulsory feasts. Attendance was mandatory for all Israel, and being a small country, the longest journey to Jerusalem would have been no more than about 150 miles (Israel is 300 mile long with Jerusalem in the middle). I read that a man did a charity run of 100 mile in 24 hours so a foot journey could be accomplished in 4 days from the borders.



The 3 feasts are, *Deu 16:16 Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose; in the feast of* ***unleavened bread****, and in the* ***feast of weeks****, and in the* ***feast***

of tabernacles*: and they shall not appear before the LORD empty: Deu 16:17 Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD thy God which he hath given thee.*

1. **The feast of unleavened bread = Passover.**
2. **The feast of weeks = Pentecost .**
3. **The feast of tabernacles = Booths/tents**.

Israel had a Civil New Year and a religious or Ecclesiastical New Year, two New Years in one year. Rosh Hashanah, the “head of the year”, is a two-day observance and celebration that begins on the first day of Tishrei, which is the first month of the Civil year (the seventh month of the Ecclesiastical year).

The Ecclesiastical lunar new year was on the first day of the first month Nisan, the spring Passover month which marks Israel's Exodus from Egypt, March/April. Rosh Hashanah marks the beginning of the civil year, September/October, six month later. According to the teachings of Judaism, Rosh Hashanah, the head of the year, is the traditional anniversary of the creation of Adam and Eve, the first man and woman according to the Hebrew Bible, as well as the initiation of humanity's role in God's world.

All of the 3 feasts were redemptive in origin and all dated from the time in Egypt*, Deu 16:6 But at the place which the LORD thy God shall choose to place his name in, there thou shalt sacrifice the passover at even, at the going down of the sun, at the season* ***that thou camest forth out of Egypt****. ..... Deu 16:10 And thou shalt keep the feast of weeks unto the LORD thy God with a tribute of a freewill offering of thine hand, which thou shalt give unto the LORD thy God, according as the LORD thy God hath blessed thee:..Deu 16:12 And thou shalt remember that* ***thou wast a bondman in Egypt****: and thou shalt observe and do these statutes.....Lev 23:42 Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths: Lev 23:43 That your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths****, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt****: I am the LORD your God*.

These 3 major feasts, were **compulsory feasts**, and designed to remind the Israelites where they had come from. From out of bondage, slavery, and the NT covenant feast follows a similar pattern. The NT feast is the memorial of the Lords death, *1Co 11:24 And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. 1Co 11:25 After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. 1Co 11:26 For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come*. I might paraphrase this feast as saying, ”**remember from whence thou camest and to whence thou goest and Who made it possible**”.

There was something else to be done during the feast of tents*. Deu 31:10 And Moses commanded them, saying, At the end of every seven years, in the solemnity of the year of release, in the feast of tabernacles, Deu 31:11 When all Israel is come to appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose, thou shalt read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Deu 31:12 Gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the LORD your God, and observe to do all the words of this law: Deu 31:13 And that their children, which have not known any thing, may hear, and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as ye live in the land whither ye go over Jordan to possess it.*

They read the Law every 7 years at this feast, publicly, on the Civil New Year, to remind them that the Law was not just for ecclesiastical observance, it had something to say about civil interactions outside of religion. Religion had two themes, God and the love to God and your neighbour and love for him. A good description of the occasion is given in the book of Nehemiah, *Neh 8:2 And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month. Neh 8:3 And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law. Neh 8:4 And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose; and beside him stood Mattithiah, and Shema, and Anaiah, and Urijah, and Hilkiah, and Maaseiah, on his right hand; and on his left hand, Pedaiah, and Mishael, and Malchiah, and Hashum, and Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam. Neh 8:5 And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up: Neh 8:6 And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground. Neh 8:7 Also Jeshua, and Bani, and Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, caused the people to understand the law: and the people stood in their place. Neh 8:8 So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and* ***gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading****.

It was most important that they, "***gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading"***. It was not just read to them, they were given an exposition of the law. People today read the Bible but few study it. By that, I mean that they rely mainly on other people to give the sense of the passage. They do not personally study the word and work out its meaning like the Berean's, *Act 17:10 And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. Act*

17:11 These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

There has never been a time when study aids were so cheap and available, and so little used. Today when reading has given way to videos and social media, Christians do not give so much time to reading the Word of God. Many do not get through the Bible in a lifetime. A survey from 2021 found that 11 percent of Americans read the Bible daily. Trends in reading habits over four years showed that the majority of Americans never read the Bible, however in 2021 this number dropped to 29 percent of respondents.

Bible readership varies across each demographic, with Millennials most likely never to have read the Bible, whereas the most frequent readers were those aged over 70 years old. Looking at the preferences of the older readers, traditional books were favoured, with 91 percent opting for a print version of the Bible to read over other formats, according to Barna research.

Americans have a positive view of the Bible and many say the Christian Scriptures are filled with moral lessons for today. However, more than half of Americans have read little or none of the Bible.
Less than a quarter of those who have ever read a Bible, have a systematic plan for reading the Christian Scriptures each day. And a third of Americans never pick it up on their own, according to a new study from Nashville-based Lifeway Research. Small wonder many church leaders worry about biblical illiteracy, said Scott McConnell, executive director of Lifeway Research.

Shame on us all. No wonder many Christians have potty ideas about the Bible, prophecy and the end times when the read so little, and meditate less.

Mary and Joseph, despite their poverty, were none-the-less devout believers, and made their way to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover. Jesus attended every Passover from His birth to His death when He became the ultimate, final, Passover. *Lev 23:5 In the fourteenth day of the first month at even is the LORD'S passover. Lev 23:6 And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the feast of unleavened bread unto the LORD: seven days ye must eat unleavened bread*. This was Jesus' 12th Passover.

We do not often think about contemporary events in the life of Jesus, and we see Him in that splendid isolation from the world. We forget that there are others, we forget the people Jesus would come into contact with in the future. We forget that it was about this time, He set that woman on a course of suffering, to be healed by Him 18 years later, *Luk 13:11 And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself..... Luk 13:16 And ought not this woman, being a daughter of*

Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day? She suffered and despaired for 18 years, praying, hoping, for healing, satan appearing to triumph, Jesus doing nothing.

Yes, Jesus healed, and we all jump around and hail the mighty miracles, but do we fail to see the fact that He caused the illness in the first place. No, He did not, cry the ignorant and uninformed. There is no way Jesus would do that. But if He did not who did? If a man suffers ill, then it comes about through nature as the prime mover or it comes about by the malignant forces of the devil or it is brought about by God. Who then is ultimately responsible? Who is the first cause, because He is the greatest power? If God gives permission, He is responsible, *Exo 4:11 But the LORD answered, "Who makes people able to speak or makes them deaf or unable to speak? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Don't you know that I am the one who does these things?*

What a frightening world it would be with no God in control. Someone said of Covid, ”the virus does not respect intelligence, any one can die from it”. That is not a Biblical approach to disease, but this is, *Joh 9:2 And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Joh 9:3 Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him*. The man was born blind, in this case not for personal sin, not for the sins of his parents, not because it was from nature or the devil but that, “*the works of God should be made manifest in him*”. Everybody speculated on the cause but they were wrong. It was to show God’s power.

Moses learned this, at the burning bush, *Exo 4:11 And the LORD said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? or* ***who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind****? have not I the LORD?* It is worth looking at this verse in more detail.

Interestingly, the Lord does not extol His perfect creation. He does not say, “who makes the beautiful, the healthy, the eloquent, the perceptive, the knowledgeable”, setting their perfections before Moses, as if it were something to aspire to. He does the opposite. He sets the disabled before Moses, the broken pots of life, the weak and feeble souls of life, to teach Moses a lesson. Paul puts it this way, *2Co 4:7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us*.

We might ask why God chose this lisping man, Moses, when there were many good orators about. Why not choose Aaron who could speak? He did so for this very reason, that in Moses imperfection, He might have pre-eminence, and that people would see that this man of stammering tongue must have a great power behind him to overcome the weakness of the flesh.

It is not a handicap that God has given to Moses, He has disabled some functions of the man so that He can supply some gift. For the Christian, the word handicapped does not exist, *Php 4:19 But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus*. He sails through life with the wind of Gods purpose and grace behind him, filling his sails.

There were many people disabled, and many others about to become so. There was a man who already had a infirmity, *Joh 5:5 And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years.* There was a woman about to have an issue of blood. *Luk 8:43 And a woman having an issue of blood twelve years, which had spent all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any.* There were the blind, born blind and made blind, the crippled, those who would develop leprosy, those who would be demon oppressed and those who would be demon possessed, all manner of diseases, all coming upon mankind. There was a woman who was eighteen years from being healed, just about to be bound by satan, and she was a daughter of Abraham, L*uk 13:11 And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself.* And Jesus did nothing to help her. It would be only a few short but sad years until they all looked into the eyes of their healer, but that is nothing compared to the eternity of joy with Him.

Here we see Jesus, 12 years old, letting it all happen, when He could have stopped it. But then, you see, if He healed the world, why would people come to Him, and besides this, we are forgetting a most important truth. He was subject to the will of the Father. It is not an unwillingness to act, *Joh 5:30 I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.*

God seems to act slowly upon our behalf, yet it is His longsuffering we forget, *Rom 2:4 Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?* And we Christians can never complain because, ***Rom 8:28*** *And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose*.

We may comfort ourselves in this, that young Jesus knew of all the suffering in the world, was compassionate by nature, but God’s concerns were more important. As He must be about His Fathers business, so should we be.

15. Jesus speaks to the rulers. *Luke 2:41*

Luk 2:41 Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover.

I had wondered where Joseph and Mary stayed in Jerusalem, with their growing family. It was not only their immediate family but also kith and kin, their friends or acquaintances and all the people they were friends with in Nazareth. We know this because they travelled in a group of friends, and because it was a tight knit group, where people knew each other, they could relax that their children were safe. *Luk 2:44 But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance.*

Where would they all stay? If you find a nice place to stay, you often return to it. There is no point in all the hassle of looking for somewhere to stay, especially if you have got other things to do on a holiday. Some people go to the same place every year and I think Joseph did this because they had come for the purpose of celebrating the Passover, and Jerusalem would have been bursting at the seams with people. Josephus, a Jewish historian contemporary with the Gospels' authors, writes that on Passover, the population of Jerusalem swelled to **more than two million** (perhaps a bit exaggerated) as Jews made pilgrimages to the Temple for the annual celebration of Israel's liberation from slavery in Egypt. It made a lot of sense to have a place booked, and booked regularly.

I am going to speculate that they stayed in a regular place because they went up to the 3 feasts of the Lord each year, and as it was a regular occurrence, they had a permanent booking. It would have been good for the travellers and good for the home owner, as they would have known each other as friends and good guests. This may have gone on with the families and home owner for years, and with their past relatives for a hundred years. They stayed in the same house which enabled them to eat the Passover together as the children of Israel did when they implemented the feast. The could eat the lamb, with their neighbours, *Exo 12:4 And if the household be too little for the lamb, let him and his neighbour next unto his house take it according to the number of the souls; every man according to his eating shall make your count for the lamb*.

It also goes someway to explaining why the Lord used the same place for the last supper, *Luk 22:7 Then came the day of unleavened bread, when the passover must be killed. Luk 22:8 And he sent Peter and John, saying, Go and prepare us the passover, that we may eat. Luk 22:9 And they said unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare? Luk 22:10 And he said unto them, Behold, when ye are entered into the city, there shall a man meet you, bearing a pitcher of water; follow him into the house where he entereth in. Luk 22:11 And ye shall say unto the goodman of the house, The Master saith unto thee, Where is the guestchamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples? Luk 22:12* ***And he shall shew you a large upper room furnished: there make ready****. Luk 22:13 And they went, and found as he had said unto them: and they made ready the passover*.

Have you ever wondered how the Lord knew the room would be ready for Him? It always was for Him and His family. From the time of His childhood when He went up with Joseph and Mary, past the time when He went up aged 12, through His teens and twenties, it was the same place that He used every year, and all He had to say was, "***The Master saith unto thee***" and the good man of the house, the οἰκοδεσπότης = oikodespotēs, the master of the house would let Him in, because he knew Him.

Luk 2:43 And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it. Luk 2:44 ***But they, supposing him to have been in the company****, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. Luk 2:45 And when they found him not, they* ***turned back again to Jerusalem****, seeking him. Luk 2:46 And it came to pass, that after* ***three days*** *they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions*. This insight into the character and determination of Jesus shows us exactly what sort of young man He was. Serious, gregarious, single minded, bold, enquiring, knowledgeable, fascinating, and charismatic. He was the centre of attention, "in the midst" of the teachers, "*sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions*."

There are a further 18 years, the silent years, when nothing is written and we are left wondering what happened to Jesus? Did He hibernate and do nothing? I think these verses before us give us a clue.

His parents brought Him up to observe the law, which all good Jews did, *Luk 2:41 Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover. Luk 2:42 And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast.* He may have been God incarnate, but that did not absolve Joseph and Mary of their duty as guardians and parents. It was I think, a religious home, but not the sort of home where everyone went about in silence with long faces, praying all the time, the stereotypical "religious" family that is portrayed by the woke media. It was a working family that had its problems with taxes, the Romans, the religious leaders, disease, getting food on the table, the cost of buying the necessities of life, all the problems of living. God did not spare His Son the difficulties of life and we should not expect to be spared either.

The young Jesus was human and tempted just as we are, *Heb 4:15 For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.* There were times of necessity, times of sickness, times of death when He would be tempted to use His powers, before His time had come, just to alleviate the suffering, just to help His brethren, perhaps to give some respite to His struggling earthly family the Father had given to Him. The devil was ever present then, not just at His

temptation later, trying to trip Him up, trying to make Him fall. Life was a hazard to this boy. If He had used His power to make life easy for Joseph, Mary and His brothers and sisters, we would have cried foul. They did not enjoy Divine privileges for having Jesus in their family.

How they must have looked forward to these religious festivals. Oases in the hard desert of the reality of life, looking forward to that Kingdom of God, an opportunity for reflection upon life. It must have been a joyful company that went up to Jerusalem, happy laughter accompanying them, time to converse with friends on the walk, time to enjoy the travelling and anticipating what lay ahead of them when they arrived. I think that they would have travelled the more direct route to Jerusalem for the reason that it took them past the historic monuments of their forbearers. Down from Nazareth, across the plains of Jezreel, past Megiddo, along the high backbone of Israel, through Shechem where the Patriarchs, their beloved ancestors lived, up to Jerusalem, the City of their fore fathers.

Here was Joseph, the heir to the Kingdom of David on earth, going home to his City, the City of David, not Bethlehem. They must have talked about it often and that the occupiers, the Romans, who had no right to the land. How must they have longed for another king like David to throw the Romans out? I wonder what emotions flooded the senses as they approached the ancient northern gate of the city, now called the Damascus gate, and from there walked into Jerusalem. I wonder what thoughts went through Jesus' mind as He travelled with that party, seeing the places that would be etched on history as the places leading to the crucifixion.

This must have impressed itself upon Jesus, the more so as the time drew near for His ministry to commence. He must have done His Divine apprenticeship in quiet obedience to the Father, not garnering much attention but at the same time quietly exercising that strength of character and personality which made Him unique, and facing the dreadful day in the future when He would die.

Can you imagine the craftsmanship of the objects that He made, the same hands that had thrown down the earth and stars? The perfect items that would now be worth a fortune, if they were found, antiques of priceless antiquity. Why don't we have anything that remains of His work up to the time of His ministry? I think it is most deliberate. I think that this part of His life has been covered up, and we can only speculate about it, for the reason that it would be a distraction from what He came to do. He lived in this world but the formative part of His life is a

deliberate mystery. Mary could have recounted to Luke many stories of the young Jesus, the teenage Jesus, the man Jesus, the things He did as a child, His kindness, His thoughtfulness, what a charming person He was, how selfless He was, the perfect person. She kept silent and these are the silent years or rather the hidden years.

There is however, a glimpse into His character, by the only event Mary recorded, His visit to the Temple. It must have impressed her and left a deep impression as to what sort of person He would become. *Luk 2:46 And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. Luk 2:47 And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers*.

In the Temple, not Solomon's temple for that had been destroyed by the Babylonians, in Herod's temple, Jesus speaks to the teachers of the Law. Now Herod had not built his temple out of any religious conviction but to pacify and ingratiate himself with the Jews. Herod was the man who only 12 years earlier had massacred the children in Bethlehem. But it was not the man Herod that sanctified the temple, it was God, and if they would see it, this was God in their midst, Jesus.

Mal 3:1 I, the LORD All-Powerful, will send my messenger to prepare the way for me. Then suddenly the Lord you are looking for will appear in his temple. The messenger you desire is coming with my promise, and he is on his way. Mal 3:2 On the day the Lord comes, he will be like a furnace that purifies silver or like strong soap in a washbasin. No one will be able to stand up to him. CEV.

Jesus had been coming to the temple for many years, ever since He was presented according to the law. How privileged these men were to have God incarnate, Jesus, seated in their midst. God was there but did they see Him? Were they looking for another type of manifestation? It is obvious that they did not see "Him" for what He was.

What questions did they ask and what were the answers? I think that the subject was the Law. There was no greater subject than that for the Jews. There was a growing body of oral tradition in Jesus time, since many details of what constituted law were seemingly obscure. The oral laws were eventually written down in about 200 AD but for now they were oral.

The Oral Law is a legal commentary on the Torah, explaining how its commandments are to be carried out. Common sense suggests that some sort of oral tradition was always needed to accompany the Written Law, because the Torah alone, even with its 613 commandments, is an insufficient guide to Jewish life. For example, the fourth of the Ten Commandments, ordains, "Remember the Sabbath day to make it holy" (Exodus 20:8). From the Sabbath's inclusion in the

Ten Commandments, it is clear that the Torah regards it as an important holiday. Yet when one looks for the specific biblical laws regulating how to observe the day, one finds only injunctions against lighting a fire, going away from one's dwelling, cutting down a tree, ploughing and harvesting. Would merely refraining from these few activities fulfil the biblical command to make the Sabbath holy?

Perhaps Jesus challenged their understanding of the "oral" law. This certainly seems one of the things He became good at and He later takes them on, at their abuse of the law, in favour of oral tradition, for example, *Mat 5:38* ***Ye have heard that it hath been said****, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: Mat 5:39 But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. Mat 5:40 And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. Mat 5:41 And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Mat 5:42 Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.*

The whole of Matthew chapter 5 deals with this lack of understanding of law and the introduction of traditions. "*Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time*" was the introduction to God's law, over man's interpretation of it. I think that Jesus was starting to flex His spiritual muscles.

But why weren't the Teacher's upset by Him? They certainly were later on when He confronted them, but for now Jesus is talking to them, and to them, He is just a smart kid. They have years of experience and He hasn't, but never the less they were impressed, "*all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers"*.

They were not the only ones impressed. When His parents caught up with Him they were amazed, *Luk 2:48 And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing. Luk 2:49 And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about* ***my Father's business*****?** Probably He was not at all precocious, but now they had to adjust there ideas about Him.

He was on a mission, His "Father's business" was His primary concern and Joseph must take second place, even if they did not understand what He said, *Luk 2:50 And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them. Luk 2:51 And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart. Luk 2:52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and* ***in favour with God and man***.

Mary took account of these things and she kept the sayings in her heart.

16. The Kingdom. *Luke 3:3 - 7*

It is now 18 years since we last heard of Jesus, and 30 years since we heard of John. We do not get that feeling of time passing in Scripture and as we turn the page of sacred history that may only take a moment, we suddenly are aware that we have moved on, not seconds, but a generation. The young people we last saw are now become mature men.

The hidden years of John the Baptist and Jesus have come to an end. What we have read so far in Luke's historical document is not included in the Gospel's of Mark and John, and is differently reported to Matthew. It is not important enough for Mark and John's accounts. John writes with a purpose, *Joh 20:30 And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: Joh 20:31 But these are written, that* ***ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ****, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name*.

This means that what we have learned so far in Luke's account is not essential knowledge for salvation. You can leave the miraculous birth out of the story of Christ, although this does assume that the 4 Gospels are not connected as a whole. Mark and John do not give an account of Jesus' birth, although they may know about Matthew and Luke's accounts and thought they were enough details. The accounts of Matthew and Luke differ or rather, compliment each other by giving differing insights to the story of Jesus. I think Matthew would have been better understood by Jews and Luke's account would have been better understood by the Greeks.

Luke	Matthew
A census requires Joseph and Mary to go from their home in Nazareth to Bethlehem.	An angel appears to Joseph to reassure him, and so he marries Mary.
Jesus is born in Bethlehem.	Jesus is born in Bethlehem.
There is "no room in the inn"; Mary places Jesus in a manger.	Perhaps two years later (or perhaps not), wise men see his star. They come and inform Herod.
Nearby shepherds are told of these events by angels.	The wise men – bringing gifts – find Jesus in Bethlehem.
The shepherds visit the family.	Warned in a dream, Joseph and family flee from Bethlehem to Egypt.
After about a month or so, Jesus is taken to the temple in Jerusalem.	Herod commences the massacre of the infants.
There, Simeon and Anna praise	Herod dies. Informed in a dream of

Jesus.	Herod's death, Joseph takes the family back.
Soon after, Joseph and Mary return to their home in Nazareth.	But he is afraid to go to Judea so he makes their home in Nazareth, Galilee.

When trying to date historical events, man has adopted a scale which incorporates AD and BC. Standardized under the Julian and Gregorian calendars, the system spread throughout Europe and the Christian world during the centuries that followed. AD stands for Anno Domini, Latin for "in the year of the Lord", while BC stands for "before Christ".

Have you considered the term Anno Domini, in the year of our Lord? Is it really correct to place everything before Christ's physical birth as BC? This is theologically incorrect. Christ, according to Scripture is eternal and pre-existed the world, so there cannot be a "before Christ". All of the creation was His and it happened before the world was created, *Joh 1:3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.*

To say that there was a time before or without Christ, is to say that we were without the comfort of His presence in the OT, that Abraham could not rejoice to see His day, and how could David speak to Him if he did not exist, *Luk 20:42 And David himself saith in the book of Psalms, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Luk 20:43 Till I make thine enemies thy footstool. Luk 20:44 David therefore calleth him Lord, how is he then his son?* How could the prophets know His spirit, ***1Pe 1:11*** *Searching what, or what manner of time the* ***Spirit of Christ which was in them*** *did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow*.

"Before Christ" is a term of ignorance about the Glory of Christ. It is a denial of the pre-existence of Christ and a poor understanding of Scripture. Surely it is better to date the fallen world differently, to date it from the entry of the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Heaven? You can have a BK, before the Kingdom and AK, after the Kingdom, as the Scripture lays down the time at which the kingdom starts to be preached, but not Before Christ. *Mat 3:1 In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, Mat 3:2 And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*.

The start of John's ministry, the start of the Exodus from the Kingdom of Israel to the kingdom of Heaven, is dated not using an arbitrary calendar made by men, from some point in time defined as year zero. It is defined in terms of the people who were around at that precise moment, *Luk 3:1 Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judaea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituraea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene, Luk 3:2 Annas and*

Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.

We know who was the Emperor of Rome, the Governor of Judea, the ruler in Galilee, the ruler in Ituraea and Trachonitis, the ruler in Abilene, and the two High priests (there should have been one), all in place and fixing this date for all time, these men preside over that history which shall overtake them. It also dates the lineage of Christ back to the beginning, to Adam (which we shall come to in Luke chapter 3 verse 23). **So we have a complete timeline from the Creation to the commencement of the Kingdom**, represented by human beings, not arbitrary dates. Now it begins, "the Kingdom is at hand", the moment has arrived.

John's message ties back into the OT prophecy of Isaiah, who prophesied for about 50 years, around 700 BC, covering the captivity of Israel by Assyria, which left Judah alone in the land for another 100 years, until the destruction of the Temple and their carrying away into captivity.

Isaiah may be described as the Bible in miniature. By a strange Providence there are 39 books of the OT and 27 books in the NT according to our Protestant canon, 66 books and there are 66 chapters in Isaiah. In Isaiah there are 39 chapters dealing with the sins of the nations, the OT, then at chapter 40 is the start of the Gospel of hope, the NT of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, *Isa 40:1 Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Isa 40:2 Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD'S hand double for all her sins. Isa 40:3 The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.*

In the middle of this "NT" section, at Isaiah 53, between chapter 40 and chapter 66. we have the outline of the suffering Saviour, *Isa 53:3 He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Isa 53:4 Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. Isa 53:5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed*. It may be that it is just fortuitous that there are these divisions in our Bible, but it may help us to remember the divisions in Isaiah.

Luke takes the passage in Isaiah as his introduction to the mature John the Baptist, *Luk 3:3 And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins; Luk 3:4 As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Luk 3:5*

Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; Luk 3:6 And all flesh shall see the salvation of God, Luk 3:7 Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

He comes like a wandering Ox, lowing as he comes, crying, from βοάω = boaō to cry, and this from βοῦς = bous, an Ox. The NT follows the Septuagint. This lone Ox of a man, preaches a singular message of repentance to the people*, Luk 3:7 Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?* Who in their right mind would say that to earnest enquirers? If you went into a pulpit and spoke to a congregation like that, there would be an outcry. They would say, "no that's not who I am, how dare you call me a viper".

But the more you go on in the Christian life, the more sins you find, and the viler you see yourself. I am a sinner and the trouble is there is nothing I can do about it. I cannot defend my behaviour, and I must flee from the coming wrath. If I say that I am not a viper, I am a liar. I am by nature a child of the devil, and if he is a serpent, and I am his child, I am rightly of the generation of serpents, vipers. So John is quite right to call us vipers.

We do not preach the sin of man any more. And that is precisely where preaching has gone wrong. Today's preachers like to give warm, non-committal message, telling the people about bits of the Bible, with little or no relevance to their congregations. They shoot over the heads of the congregation, at the others, at those outside, while those inside get the sunshine of approval. They are the people in the pews, accepted by God, righteous, and they do not need correcting and so the preaching is innocuous. They are heading towards hell and they refuse to listen.

The "coming wrath" is a reality in every generation. The person who denies it is a fool. The question is WHO has warned you to flee. You can flee from something or you can flee towards something, *Pro 18:10 The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe*. Where will you turn?

Where were the people to flee? They had somehow received a warning, not from John, as he asks them the question. What has stirred in these people to make them concerned? They certainly repented because they were Baptised, *Luk 3:3 And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.* They were troubled souls, wandering with John in the wilderness, they were looking for something that would give their souls rest. They were not bothered by being called vipers, they knew that they were, but how to get rid of that guilt which had them tied down, Ah, that was the thing!

The first part of the Baptist's speech shows that John came for another more important purpose, *Luk 3:4 As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness,* ***Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight***. It was preparatory for the coming of the Lord, and John was getting a body of people ready for the Lord, and the way he gets the ready is by getting them to turn away from sin.

Who had warned them to flee sin, repent, turn to God and be baptised, if it were not John? The only Person that could truly warn them, change their hearts was the Lord. He both demands that you do it, and that He will graciously do it for you. This may seem strange, but God's demands are fulfilled by Him, *Deu 10:16 Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked,* is the demand on man, *Deu 30:6 And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live*, is the response of God.

God Himself, through His Spirit, had graciously gathered this people together, and the Baptist was ready for them. Have you ever considered how it came about? John did not have the means of publication that we have, he could not advertise, his readers could scarcely read. He did not put up posters telling everyone that John the Baptist will preach by the Jordan River, on such and such a date and time. He was not a self-publicist, a man who blew his own trumpet. He was a man of the wilderness with few friends, he had no means at his disposal, but he had the Lord. *The word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins*; A Divine call came through for John to preach and he went, like Moses, *Exo 3:12 And he said, Certainly I will be with thee; and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain. Exo 3:13 And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them? Exo 3:14 And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you*. The God of Israel had come to Him.

We may ask the question, "with what voice did John utter the words, "Who" has warned you to flee the coming wrath?" Was it in hardness of speech, or sheer amazement, surprise? Was it more like, "Goodness, how amazing, who warned you about the judgement of God?" I think John was pleasantly surprised when people met him and listened to him, even if they were a brood of vipers.

But did these people understand why they came? Who was it warned them? I know for a fact that where the hand of God is at work, that dirty black hand of

satan will also be at work muddying the waters. It is a question we should ask, lest we are deceived. Did they show up because they were truly repentant, or did they go with friends to show religious solidarity, did they go for a show, that they were conformists but had no interest in their heart? It is an important question.

You may say it does not matter "who" warns me to flee the wrath to come, because at least they are directing me, but that is not true, and that causes a lot of confusion today. That is why there is so much religion, so many divisions, so many denominations in the world today. They all have a way for you to flee from the wrath of God and they are not all right*, Mat 7:13 Go in through the narrow gate. The gate to destruction is wide, and the road that leads there is easy to follow. A lot of people go through that gate. Mat 7:14 But the gate to life is very narrow. The road that leads there is so hard to follow that* ***only a few people find it****.* It is a small path.

As they came to John, he warned them*, Luk 3:8 Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves,* ***We have Abraham to our father****: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.* They came with preconceptions, that because they were the children of Abraham, they were owed a special blessing. We come with our preconceptions, that we had godly parents, that we were brought up in a religious environment, that we never did anything really bad, that we were occasionally religious, and that it does not matter too much who you believe because all religions lead to he same God. No they do not.

"Who" warns us, is of supreme importance and John is showing them who the person is. That is why John prepares the people for Christ. He does not prepare them to enter the church of England, the catholic church, a synagogue, the Jehovah's witnesses or any other man made institution. He prepares them to meet a person, Jesus Christ. There is no other person, no other Name, *Act 4:10 Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. Act 4:11 This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Act 4:12* ***Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved****. Act 4:13 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus*.

You can search other religions for the truth until you weary yourself, but I tell you, that if you do not find Christ the person, for yourself, you are eternally and utterly lost, in the realm of religion.

17. The rules of the Kingdom. *Luke 3:7 - 14*

Luk 3:7 He said therefore to the crowds which went out to be baptised by him, Offspring of vipers, who has forewarned you to flee from the coming wrath? Luk 3:8 Produce therefore fruits worthy of ***repentance****; and begin not to say in yourselves, We have Abraham for our father, for I say unto you that God is able of these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Luk 3:9 And already also the axe is applied to the root of the trees; every tree therefore not producing good fruit is cut down and cast into the fire. Luk 3:10 And the crowds asked him saying, What should we do then? Luk 3:11 And he answering says to them, He that has two body-coats, let him give to him that has none; and he that has food, let him do likewise. Luk 3:12 And tax-gatherers came also to be baptised, and they said to him, Teacher, what should we do? Luk 3:13 And he said to them, Take no more money than what is appointed to you. Luk 3:14 And persons engaged in military service also asked him saying, And we, what should we do? And he said to them, Oppress no one, nor accuse falsely, and be satisfied with your pay*.

We shall see that repentance is more than an apology, saying that you are sorry. You've got to do something because it is no good being a hearer only. You must bring out good fruits, worthy fruits, *fruits worthy of* ***repentance".*** Before we come to this let us briefly examine the Jewish religion and religion in general.

What is "religion"? You may best see it when people go into a church building. A piety overtakes them, they change their countenance, their attitude changes, their language is moderated, and there is a hushed reverent silence and conformity to the patterns of religion. They try to be different people when they enter a sacred space but they go out the same as they went in and they are still hypocrites. Here is an article on religion,

> **Religion** is defined as a social-cultural system of designated behaviours and practices, morals, beliefs, worldviews, texts, sanctified places, prophecies, ethics, or organisations that relates humanity to supernatural, transcendental, and spiritual elements; however, there is no scholarly consensus over what precisely constitutes a religion.
>
> Cultural Christianity is religion that superficially identifies itself as "Christianity" but does not truly adhere to the faith. A "cultural Christian" is a nominal believer, he wears the label "Christian," but the label has more to do with his family background and upbringing than any personal conviction that Jesus is Lord.
>
> Cultural Christianity is more social than spiritual. A cultural Christian identifies with certain aspects of Christianity, such as the good works of Jesus, but rejects the spiritual aspects required to be a biblically defined Christian. Some people consider themselves "Christians"

because of family background, personal experience, country of residence, or social environment. Others identify as “Christian” as a way of declaring a religious affiliation, as opposed to being “Muslim” or “Buddhist.” Famed scientist and atheist Richard Dawkins refers to himself as a “cultural Christian” because he admires some of the ceremonial and philanthropic aspects of Christianity. Dawkins is not born again; he simply sees “Christianity” as a label to use.

In free nations, the gospel is often presented as a costless addition to one’s life: just add churchgoing to your hobbies, add charitable giving to your list of good deeds, or add the cross to the trophies on your mantle. In this way, many people go through the motions of “accepting Jesus” with no accompanying surrender to His lordship. These people, who do not “abide in Christ,” are cultural Christians. They are branches that hang around the True Vine but have no true attachment (see John 15:1–8).

There was no such thing as cultural Christianity in the days of the early church. In fact, to be a Christian was to more than likely be marked as a target of persecution. The very term Christian was coined in the city of Antioch as a way to identify the first followers of Christ (Acts 11:26). The first disciples were so much like Jesus that they were called “little Christ’s” by their detractors. Unfortunately, the term has lost meaning over the years and come to represent an ideology or a social class rather than a lifestyle of obedience to God.

What is the Biblical definition? *Jas 1:27 Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.*

It is not about doing rituals, things that most people do not understand, the washings, the commemoration or veneration (of deities and/or saints), sacrifices, festivals, feasts, initiations, genuflecting, meditation, prayer, music, art, dance, public service, or other aspects of human culture. People do like religion and the greater the ceremonies, the greater they like it. Naaman the leper liked ceremonies, probably because he was close to the king. His experience with Elisha taught him differently, that its not “the bigger the event the better the day”. It is obedience to the word of God that counts.

2Ki 5:10 And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean. 2Ki 5:11 But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the LORD his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. 2Ki 5:12 Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may

*I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage. 2Ki 5:13 And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, My father**, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it**? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean? 2Ki 5:14 Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean*.

Spurgeon said,

> Garment-rending and other outward signs of religious emotion, are easily manifested and are frequently hypocritical; but to feel true repentance is far more difficult, and consequently far less common. Men will attend to the most multiplied and minute ceremonial regulations, for such things are pleasing to the flesh, but true religion is too humbling, too heart-searching, too thorough for the tastes of the carnal men; they prefer something more ostentatious, flimsy, and worldly. Outward observances are temporarily comfortable; eye and ear are pleased; self-conceit is fed, and self-righteousness is puffed up: but they are ultimately delusive, for in the article of death, and at the Day of Judgment, the soul needs something more substantial than ceremonies and rituals to lean upon. Apart from vital godliness all religion is utterly vain; offered without a sincere heart, every form of worship is a solemn sham and an impudent mockery of the majesty of heaven.

John the Baptist does not "do" religion. He does not say, "if you want to know more, come to my synagogue", or "if you want to get right with God, I want you to pray the prayer of commitment, and you will be saved", or "I want you to come forward and give your life to God". He does none of those things and he holds no enquiry to show whether or not the people have responded correctly. He doesn't play the numbers game, because he is the messenger and God alone gives the increase*, Act 15:18 Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.*

John the Baptist is practical, down to earth, and does not obscure his teaching with some esoteric, impenetrable rituals. He sees it as it is and says it like it is. He speaks plainly to the people, *Luk 3:10 And the crowds asked him saying, What should we do then? Luk 3:11 And he answering says to them, He that has two body-coats, let him give to him that has none; and he that has food, let him do likewise. Luk 3:12 And tax-gatherers came also to be baptised, and they said to him, Teacher, what should we do? Luk 3:13 And he said to them, Take no more money than what is appointed to you. Luk 3:14 And persons engaged in military service also asked him saying, And we, what should we do? And he said to them, Oppress no one, nor accuse falsely, and be satisfied with your pay*.

Three things “to do” are mentioned in Luke, spoken to three groups of people,

1. the crowds,
2. the tax collectors and
3. the military.

In answer to their questions “what shall we do”, he replies, "If you have two coats, give one to someone who doesn't have any. If you have food, share it with someone else", "Don't make people pay more than they owe", "Don't force people to pay money to make you leave them alone. Be satisfied with your pay."

I do not think for a moment these are the only groups that he speaks to and that these are the only things that people are told to do. I **think that Luke is just giving us a snapshot of John’s ministry**. He is giving us a sample of the people who came to him and what he said to them. It would be a very dull ministry if that is all he said, and I think that there was much, much more that he said. All three things that they are given to repent of, relate to everyday life and to employment in particular. Christianity, as it will become known, is not a religion, it relates to you, your life and what you do in the 24 hours of each day, not in the brief time you go to a church building. If you are not prepared to come under the gaze of God, consciously, “twenty four, seven” then do not waste your time with Christianity, keep on with your empty religion. God does not want part timers.

I think the three groups of people are given in a summary **three of the ten commandments**. You have to start somewhere. The “crowds” are being told not to **covet**, "*If you have two coats, give one to someone who doesn't have any*". The tax collectors are being told not to **steal**, "*Don't make people pay more than they owe*". The soldiers are being told not to bear **false witness**, "*Don't force people to pay money to make you leave them alone*.” Sure, there are more than three commands, but you follow the drift, where he is going with this.

"***If you have two coats, give one to someone who doesn't have any. If you have food, share it with someone else*”**. What do I do, when I have given my spare coat away? As a boy I was privileged to go on a two week vacation every year to the coast, with my parents. Transport was a motor cycle and side car, a sort of coffin attached to the motor bike. I would sit behind my father on the pillion while my mother and brother sat in the side car. The reason I mention this is because of the luggage that we also carried. We fitted everything into a small suit case which we tied on the back of the sidecar. We did not possess many clothes, so we did not have much to pack but what we had lasted us two weeks. Phew, we must have hummed at the end of two weeks! Fast forward to the twenty first century and we have so many possessions, it takes two suit cases per person when travelling on holiday, we have so much.

Its not a question of “if” you have two coats, today, many have so many coats that they lose count of them. But if you give the coats away, then what? Can that be enough to repent of? I’ve done that, nothing remains for me to do. It has taken me about 5 minutes to give my coats away, and does that constitute “repentance”, is that all? Of course there is much more to do for the soul than get rid of a few old coats. I think it is what the Apostle said, *Gal 3:23 But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Gal 3:24 Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. Gal 3:25 But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster*.

John is exercising his role of teacher, a schoolmaster, teaching the law in preparation for Jesus. He is giving the crowds a taste of what is required for repentance and the law is a tool for repentance. What is repentance? The Greek μετάνοια = metanoia is composed of two words, μετά and νοια, to be of a changed mind. You may have heard of the metaverse that computer companies are developing. It is a world of avatars, an alternative world, in which you conduct your affairs, meetings, socialise, play all in that alternate reality. In a manner of speaking, we are by metanoia, repentance, transported into a metaverse, a new realm, but this time it is the ultimate reality.

Repentance gives a glimpse of that world the Saviour lives in, *Joh 3:3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, **he cannot see the kingdom of God.** Joh 3:4 Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Joh 3:5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. Joh 3:6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit*.

That new birth, which Jesus shall teach to the old Pharisee, is the key to entering the kingdom, it is God’s gift to fallen man, but it comes with a condition, repentance. If men will repent, they will be saved, *Act 2:38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost……2Co 7:10 For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death*.

The people coming to John the Baptist came firstly to be baptised, as if that were all there was to do, *Luk 3:7 Then said he to the multitude that came forth **to be baptized of him**, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Luk 3:8 Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. Luk 3:9*

And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

How strange that the people should desire this, baptism from John the Baptist, to even want it? It is a struggle to get people baptised today and they resist it, but not then. They must have had a different view about it, even known what baptism signified. I think it related to the ceremonial washings.

The Jews used a mikvah,or Mikveh, which is a bath used for the purpose of ritual immersion in Judaism to achieve ritual purity. “Mikvah” comes from the Hebrew word for **“collection**,” as in a collection of water. Most forms of ritual impurity can be purified through immersion in any natural collection of water. However, some impurities, require "living water", such as springs or groundwater wells. The mikveh look just like a baptistery, in many Baptist chapels.

The people saw John’s ministry as a cleansing from sins, as a ritual cleansing and affirmation of a change in them, but as a rite it does nothing for you, if you have not repented, that is, changed on the inside. I have seen many people come to Christ, seen them express sorrow for sin, be baptised by immersion, seen them join a church, go through teachings, do all the things that are outwardly right, but in time they rejected Christianity. At least one of the persons baptised with me, went back on the faith. Tell me, what price was their baptism, what was it all for?

The people who came to John were similar. They had not done anything about the inside, their very being, their nature. They had merely stuck “Judaism” on the door of their lives, they had only put an outward sign up which said, ”I am a Jew” but they had no sign inside of them. This is why John spoke as he did, *Luk 3:7 Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Luk 3:8 Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. Luk 3:9 And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire*.

You may wash yourself again and again, but you will not wash your guilt away without Christ and His blood. You can whiten the outside but you will still be a sepulchre, albeit a whitened sepulchre, still full of death and corruption.

18. The baptism of John. *Luke 3:7 - 9*

A summary to begin with:

1. John does not teach religion he teaches Christ
2. He preaches repentance which must show works, *Jas 2:18 Suppose someone disagrees and says, "It is possible to have faith without doing kind deeds." I would answer, "Prove that you have faith without doing kind deeds, and I will prove that I have faith by doing them."* CEV.
3. John gives practical examples of what they should do, each example relating to the commandments.
4. The baptism was a washing away of the sins with water, typical of the "mikveh".

Let us repeat our text again ahead of the exposition.

Luk 3:7 Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Luk 3:8 Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. Luk 3:9 And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

For the Jew, ritual was everything. They diligently washed, washed when they touched the unclean thing, and on every occasion that they thought they were ritually unclean, they washed. Maybe they did not understand the rules of the clean and unclean things, but they were so indoctrinated that they washed, and washed. They washed their clothes, when they were not actually dirty, but ritually unclean. They washed their hands before eating, even if they were not dirty. They washed the outside of the plates and cups even if they were clean, and as Jesus observed of them, *Luk 11:37 When Jesus finished speaking, a Pharisee invited him home for a meal. Jesus went and sat down to eat. Luk 11:38 The Pharisee was surprised that he did not wash his hands before eating. Luk 11:39 So the Lord said to him: You Pharisees clean the outside of cups and dishes,* ***but on the inside you are greedy and evil***. CEV.

Some of the Jews became very good at the minutiae of the law, and used to compete with others to be the most Jewish, dressing differently and having unwritten laws to keep, *Mat 23:4 For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move*

them with one of their fingers. Mat 23:5 But all their works they do for to be seen of men: ***they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments****, Mat 23:6 And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, Mat 23:7 And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi*.

Baptism or washing, must be seen firstly through the Jewish OT lens, and not the NT lens. We must not interpret Baptism from the NT ideas and feed it backwards to find out what the Jew was doing. That is like trying to interpret the life, times and living conditions of the 1st century of the Christian from the life, times and living conditions of the 21st century Christian.

Doesn't it surprise you that they knew what baptism meant? They did not need an in depth theological treatise to explain baptism, or argue the finer points of it, they knew what John meant by baptism. They knew what it meant because they were used to it, in fact it was a Jewish ritual and they did it almost every day. It was the **ritual washing**, the cleansing from the moral filth that they got just through walking through the streets of the world. And when John calls them to wash for the Kingdom was near, it was a preparation that they anticipated, to be washed clean, so that they could enter in.

When John saw the crowds coming and asking for baptism, for another washing, he doesn't just give them what the want, *"O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Luk 3:8 Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance".* He knows what they need but that is not what they want, and being a sound and a good teacher, he will not give them what they want and he will not cover up or soften the truth. They want another washing, a baptism, a dipping in running water, which will come but first there is something much more important that they must do.

The emphasis on baptism, washing, has become so important in some denominations, that they have a ritual of washing children.

> DEARLY beloved, forasmuch as all men are conceived and born in sin, and that our Saviour Christ saith, none can enter into the kingdom of God, except he be regenerate and born anew of Water and of the Holy Ghost: I beseech you to call upon God the Father, through our Lord Jesus Christ, that of his bounteous mercy he will grant to this Child that thing which by nature he cannot have; that he may be baptized with Water and the Holy Ghost, and received into Christ's holy Church, and be made a lively member of the same.....SEEING now, dearly beloved brethren**, that this Child is regenerate and grafted into the body of Christ's Church**, let us give thanks unto Almighty God for these benefits, and with one accord make our prayers unto him,

> that this Child may lead the rest of his life according to this beginning. (*Book of Common Prayer*).

This is precisely what John is labouring against, what he is telling them **not** to do. Be it an infant, child or and adult, they should not think for one moment, that all that is required of them is outward washing, baptism, *Luk 3:7 Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Luk 3:8 Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. Luk 3:9 And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.*

Well spoke Dr Gill,

> So that God stood in no need of these persons (Jews), nor had they any reason to boast of their natural descent from Abraham; since this in spiritual matters, and in things relating to the Gospel dispensation, would stand them in no stead, or be of any advantage to them.

These people were just like the stones lying on the banks of the Jordan river, where John baptised, they were of no special merit. The stones were little different to the people who came to John, because in matters of faith, descent is of no value whatsoever. It does not matter who your father is, that will not save you. The water washed over the stones of Jordan, and the stones were regularly baptised, but it made little difference to them, they were washed but not changed, they were stones before and they were stones after washing.

Peter tells us something about baptism, *1Pe 3:21 The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ*: A better version is, ***1Pe 3:21*** *which was a symbol pointing to baptism, which now saves you. It is not the washing off of bodily dirt, but the promise made to God from a good conscience. It saves you through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,* GNB.

What is Peter saying? He is saying that baptism is **not** "*the washing off of bodily dirt",* a cleansing of the flesh if you will. You do that many times a day with soap and it serves a purpose, but that is not what baptism is. Now I know that this is talking about Jesus baptism, but it is no different from John's baptism. The question may be raised however, if John baptised, why did Jesus baptise again, why was He an Anabaptist? We shall come to this.

True Baptism, washing, is not outward, although it has an outward symbolism, its effects are inward. It is not putting the filth of the flesh away, the outward dirt,

but it is "*the answer of a good conscience toward God"*, the inward appeal to God. It is saying to God, that I am doing this because I want to serve you with a pure conscience. I am yours to serve and not myself.

Washing is a feature of life in NT Judaism and Jesus draws on its symbolism. Jesus does His miracle of restoring blind eyes, in two stages, not because it was difficult to do, after all He created a whole man, eyes and all in an instant, out of dust. He does it in two stages to illustrate that sight comes after eyes were made and more importantly, washed, *Joh 9:7 And said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam, (which is by interpretation, Sent.)* ***He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing*****.** That man was kept blind from birth until the day that Jesus worked the miracle, to show the power of Christ and with those new eyes, he saw Christ, *Joh 9:35 Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God? Joh 9:36 He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him? Joh 9:37 And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee. Joh 9:38 And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him*.

"Seeing", is dependent on the new birth, and the new birth is contingent on **washing and the Spirit**, Joh *3:3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot* ***see*** *the kingdom of God. Joh 3:4 Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Joh 3:5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of* ***water and of the Spirit****, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God*.

Likewise, on another occasion, He healed a blind man in two stages, *Mar 8:23 And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw ought. Mar 8:24 And he looked up, and said, I see men as trees, walking. Mar 8:25 After that he put his hands again upon his eyes, and made him look up: and he was restored, and saw every man clearly*. He used water, spit, water from the mouth of God, and the man could only see in part, until Jesus laid hands upon him. It was when he was taken in hand by the Saviour that he saw. It was water and the Spirit of Christ that made him seeing.

At Cana of Galilee, Jesus did another miracle with water. But if you read the account, He first must fill the pots with water, *Joh 2:6 At the feast there were six stone water jars that were used by the people for washing themselves in the way that their religion said they must. Each jar held about twenty or thirty gallons*. CEV. Another two part miracle is taking place.

Located on the western slopes of Har Yonah near Nazareth, 'Einot Amitai features a massive cave hewn into a chalkstone hill. Its

about 2 miles from Cana. The archaeologists discovered in their inaugural excavation season this summer (2021) chalkstone vessels at different stages of production, suggesting that the cave functioned as a workshop. While vessels from tableware to cooking pots to storage jars, were usually made of clay in antiquity, Jews throughout Judea and Galilee in the first century AD used vessels made of stone. Archaeologist Yitzhak Magen explains why in “Ancient Israel’s Stone Age”:

> What was it that connected these stone vessels to Jewish purity laws? Simply this: Stone vessels, unlike ceramic and glass vessels, were not subject to impurity.
>
> Laws of ritual purity and impurity are of Biblical origin (Leviticus 11:33 ff.). During the Second Temple period, however, the rules were greatly expanded. Most of the purity laws relate to rites in the Temple. But the territory of the Temple was at least metaphorically expanded beyond the Temple confines, and ritual cleanliness was not limited to the bounds of the Temple but spread through the Jewish community. The laws affected ordinary people.
>
> It made sense to purchase a vessel that could not become unclean, for once a vessel became ritually unclean, it had to be taken out of use. An impure pottery vessel, for example, had to be broken.

But the stone vessels Jesus commandeered were empty. The Jews had either used them and already washed, emptying them, or they had fallen into disuse. I think that the former is more likely. Jesus now gets them filled and then turns the water into wine, *Joh 2:7 Jesus told the servants to fill them to the top with water. Then after the jars had been filled, Joh 2:6 And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece. Joh 2:7 Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. Joh 2:8 And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it.*

What had contained water, now contained the best wine. The wine of the Kingdom. It was not enough that they washed themselves outwardly, they had to take the wine in by drinking. It was symbolic of the life of Christ, the essential to living, *Joh 6:53 Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Joh 6:54 Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. Joh 6:55 For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. Joh 6:56* ***He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me****, and I in him*. Water was good for the purifying of the flesh but Christ’s blood gives a pure life. Life at the wedding of the lamb.

So, I could go on and show more examples, that the water did nothing for the soul, but it was the precursor of something better and John wants the people to have something better. He says, firstly you must “repent” and show this by bring forth suitable fruits, *Mat 7:15 Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Mat 7:16 Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Mat 7:17 Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. Mat 7:18 A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Mat 7:19 Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Mat 7:20 Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them*.

A thief will bring forth from the tree of corruption, the fruits of theft, stolen goods, things belonging to others, sorrow in the lives of the people he has stolen from, social distress in the people he has reduced to poverty and so it is that theft has more consequences than the loss of property. The thief must make a lot of changes. The covetous person, will steal with his eyes, he will look with jealousy and perhaps hatred upon the people who own what he desires, he will necessarily cause hurt and do anything to get what he wants. It is his idol and he is a covetous person, which is idolatry. The false witness is a liar, whether it be a false tongue, or a false balance with various weights, or a lie which sows discord, he is deceitful, he utters lies, and *Pro 25:18 A man that beareth false witness against his neighbour is a maul, and a sword, and a sharp arrow*.

The things that John speaks against are the tips of icebergs with so much more hidden. There is so much to repent of. Have you told a lie, have you stolen and have you desired what is somebody else’s or do you excuse yourself saying that my sins are not that bad. Of course you have. What is wrong with a “white lie”, and covetousness is merely the process of weighing the difference between what people own and stealing is redressing the balance between men? If truth is so cheap that you call lying a “white lie”, and covetous nothing more than “looking” on the things of others, and theft is no different from taking from the rich and giving to the poor, I have news for you. God does not want you.

There was the story of a man, a thief, who came to the Lord, or so it was said, and afterwards he continued to steal, but he said, “I have come to Christ”. He was a Christian robber, or so he thought. No, you cannot stick religion on to you life and make the gospel an appendage. It is all or nothing and if it is nothing, then you may rest assured that the Lord wants nothing to do with you. If that is all you think of His majesty, that you will not give up your former life for His sake, then you are not the sort of person He wants, you are not the “right stuff”, the material that He wants and you will never be a subject of His kingdom.

John the Baptist is **not** pleading for people to “come to the altar rail and give yourselves to God”. To the contrary, he is saying, who warned you to run from

God, you had better bring your changed lives as proof, as a passport, do not bring your proof of genealogy, its worthless, and if you show yourself to be a worthless tree, you will be cut down and cast into the fire. That is a far cry from the pleading of modern evangelists but they are not of the same stock as John.

At the core of his message is repentance, and if you do not have the sincerity to truly repent then goodbye to you.

19. The Baptism of John and Jesus.

A summary to begin with:

5. John does not teach religion he teaches Christ
6. He preaches repentance which must show works, *Jas 2:18 Suppose someone disagrees and says, "It is possible to have faith without doing kind deeds." I would answer, "Prove that you have faith without doing kind deeds, and I will prove that I have faith by doing them."* CEV.
7. John gives practical examples of what they should do, each example relating to the commandments.
8. The baptism was a washing away of the sins with water, typical of the mikveh.
9. They knew what John meant by baptism.
10. More was required than a ritual washing and that is why Jesus came. It was water and blood, water and the spirit, two parts, outward and inward.

Why did John and Jesus baptise? What was the point of it? We answered that in part by seeing it in terms of the ritual washing.

Let me first establish that baptism, washing, cleansing, purification are all effectively the same, and I have used the OT LXX version to get the Greek translation of the Hebrew. Look at the words “clean” and “dip” in this passage, *2Ki 5:12 Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash (bathe = λούω) in them, and be clean (clean = καθαρίζω)? So he turned and went away in a rage. 2Ki 5:13 And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash (bathe = λούω), and be clean (clean = καθαρίζω)? 2Ki 5:14 Then went he down, and dipped (βαπτίζω = baptize) himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his*

flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean (καθαρίζω = clean).

Bathing and baptism are the same and baptism and cleansing are the same, *Lev 14:51 And he shall take the cedar wood, and the hyssop, and the scarlet, and the living bird, and dip (βάπτω = baptise) them in the blood of the slain bird, and in the running water, and sprinkle the house seven times: Lev 14:52 And he shall cleanse the house with the blood of the bird, and with the running water, and with the living bird, and with the cedar wood, and with the hyssop, and with the scarlet*: This is the same action as, *Joh 13:26 Jesus answered, He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped (βάπτω = baptise) it. And when he had dipped (ἐμβάπτω = immersed) the sop, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon*.

Further on in the OT, yes it is the OT, in Mark's gospel, we see the Pharisees and ALL the Jews baptise themselves and the vessels they eat from, *Mar 7:4 And when they come from the market, except they wash (βαπτίζω = baptise), they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing (βαπτισμός = baptism) of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables*.

The Old Testament washings were almost always for those of the already believing community, the Jews. Washing symbolised cleansing. Cleaning washed the **outside**, sacrifice, blood sacrifice, washed the **inside**. They are two separate and distinct things. If you washed, baptised yourself, you may have been cleaner but it would be only outwardly "cleaner". The inner is cleansed by blood sacrifice, *Luk 11:39 And the Lord said unto him, Now do ye Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and the platter; but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness*.

Why not skip straight to the heart cleansing, the inward man, and leave out the washing of the outward? Well, the outward has some importance. The outward, fleshly washing, was a constant reminder of how they were unclean on the inside, *Col 2:22 All these refer to things which become useless once they are used; they are only human rules and teachings. Col 2:23 Of course such rules appear to be based on wisdom in their forced worship of angels, and false humility, and severe treatment of the body; but they have no real value in controlling physical passions*. GNB. The clean and unclean, the garments, the creatures, disease was a reminder to them of differences which made them unclean in the sight of God. John comes preparing the way for the Messiah, so under the OT, he emphasises their uncleanness by the outward forms associated with it.

He made it quite clear to the people that he only baptised with water, *Luk 3:16 John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one*

mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire: Jesus would usher in the age of His Kingship with a new baptism.

So in the first instance the baptism of John was for repentance, with water, and the baptism of Jesus was with the Holy Spirit and fire, perhaps alluding to, *Act 2:2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. Act 2:3 And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. Act 2:4 And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance*.

Did Jesus preach a different message? I think it was the same message as John, the greatest OT prophet, and Jesus just continues it until His crucifixion. He takes the lead from John, *Joh 3:27 John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. Joh 3:28 Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. Joh 3:29 He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled.*
Joh 3:30 He must increase, but I must decrease.

As John "decreases", Jesus increases, but Jesus still preaches repentance and there is no disagreement between them, *Luk 5:31 And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. Luk 5:32 I came not to call the righteous, but* ***sinners to repentance****..... Luk 24:47 And* ***that repentance and remission of sins*** *should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem*.

The people were baptised by Jesus for the same reason that John baptised, *Joh 4:1 When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, Joh 4:2 (Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples,) Joh 4:3 He left Judaea, and departed again into Galilee*. It was not a competition, and to avoid this, "*Jesus himself baptized not".* They were exactly the same "baptisms", the baptism of repentance. John and Jesus were on the same page.

Now I think that this is the point of departure, when Jesus stops the Baptism that John started. It was when Jesus entered His Kingdom, after the resurrection that His baptism took on a new meaning. He says that as part of His ministry He will be relocating, *Luk 9:29 And in His praying, the appearance of His face became different, and His clothing was dazzling white. Luk 9:30 And, behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah. Luk 9:31 Appearing in glory, they spoke of His* ***exodus****, which He was about to accomplish in Jerusalem*. LITV.

It is like the Exodus from Egypt into the promised land, except that it will be from this world, from Jerusalem below not Egypt, and it will be into Jerusalem that is above, *Gal 4:26 But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all*. Jerusalem was always associated with the kingdom, *Mic 4:8 And thou, O tower of the flock, the strong hold of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion; the kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem.* But now it is no longer an earthly kingdom with an earthly king, it is the Kingdom of Heaven, with King Jesus.

Why did Jesus get baptised by John? The answer is, "***to fulfil all righteousness",*** *Mat 3:13 Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. Mat 3:14 But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? Mat 3:15 And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: **for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness**. Then he suffered him.*

Some say that Jesus had sin and that He was identifying with the Jewish people and becoming one with them. This is blasphemy. Jesus had no sin and He already was a Jew, *1Jn 3:5 And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin*. That says two things about our Lord. That He was sinless and that He took away sin. He could not possibly take away sin, if He were a sinner. So the assumption that He was a sinner or that He took upon Himself our sin, while at the same time, going though a cleansing ritual is a contradiction.

We are more likely to find the meaning in the Scripture of the OT, where a specific ritual was given, to fulfil all righteousness. I refer to the **Day of Atonement**, the day when God and the people were reconciled in righteousness. It is usually viewed from man's viewpoint, that he is reconciled to God. But there is another side where God is reconciled with Man. It is a twofold reconciliation. The man is cleansed and the things of the Lord are cleansed. *Lev 16:16 And he shall make an atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions in all their sins: and so shall he do for the tabernacle of the congregation, that remaineth among them in the midst of their uncleanness.*

The presence of God, symbolised in all the types of the Tabernacle, had been polluted by man. Just by man's sinful presence, he had left the marks of sin, ceremonial defilement on all that was sacred. Just as when Moses saw God at the burning bush, *Exo 3:3 And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt. Exo 3:4 And when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I. Exo 3:5 And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for **the place whereon thou standest is holy ground**. Exo 3:6 Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of*

Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God.

Jesus was washed not for His sin, but for our sin and from our sin. He dwelt among us and was polluted by us, and so He was washed from our sin, not from any sin which He had done, *2Co 5:21 He made Him who personally knew nothing of sin to be a sin-offering for us, so that through union with Him we might come into right standing with God*. Williams.

We often forget that although Jesus was a man, He maintained the Holiness which He owned as God. He may have revealed Himself as a man, but He was never like you and me in this respect, He never lacked Holiness. A glimpse of this is seen in Gethsemane, *Joh 18:4 Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon him, went forth, and said unto them, Whom seek ye? Joh 18:5 They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I am he. And Judas also, which betrayed him, stood with them. Joh 18:6 As soon then as he had said unto them, I am he, they went backward, and fell to the ground*. Confronted with the Holy God the men were thrown to the ground. For an instant, in that instant, we see that He was God, Holy, and no man could take Him, unless He gave Himself up.

This Holiness was shown at His resurrection, *Joh 20:17 Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God*. The first person, as it were, to put the arms of an embrace about Him, was the Father.

When He finally ascended into heaven, He handed over to His disciples. I have often wondered why there is no direct intervention by the Lord, where He shows His hand plainly in the affairs of man. But has the Mission objective changed?

Is He really concerned with the state of the world or is He concerned with the state of man's eternal soul? The world is trying to govern itself apart from God, nations are rising, competing, but is Jesus listening to them? We condemn them for not listening to Him, but conversely is He listening to them? No. Christians are also trying to bring change, like the group advocating Christian reconstruction, and others looking for Him to govern the earth. Did Jesus work for this end or tell His disciples to work for it? No, He did not, *Joh 14:30 Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me*.

The mission has **not** changed, it is still a rescue mission. Mankind is like the crew of he Titanic rearranging the deckchairs on a sinking ship. The ship has been sinking since Adam drove it onto the rocks of disobedience and no amount of rearranging will stop it from sinking. We are all lost except we take Christ's offer, of a place in His lifeboat. He gives no solution to this worlds ill, other than "flee

from the wrath to come". That is the advice given to you and you neglect it at your peril.

Why do so many prayers go unanswered? It is because they are not relevant. We shout against the storm and He does not listen and we wonder why. We ask Him to send us the things of this world, we ask for health, we pray for long lives, why? Any thing that is for the rulers of the world, is that we might live a quiet life, anything for our enemies puts coals of fire on their heads, all the time loving them but the gift of salvation is Christ's to give. It is all vanity as the preacher said. It is the vanity of this world and the vanity of sinful men who think that God works for them, in spite of their rejection.

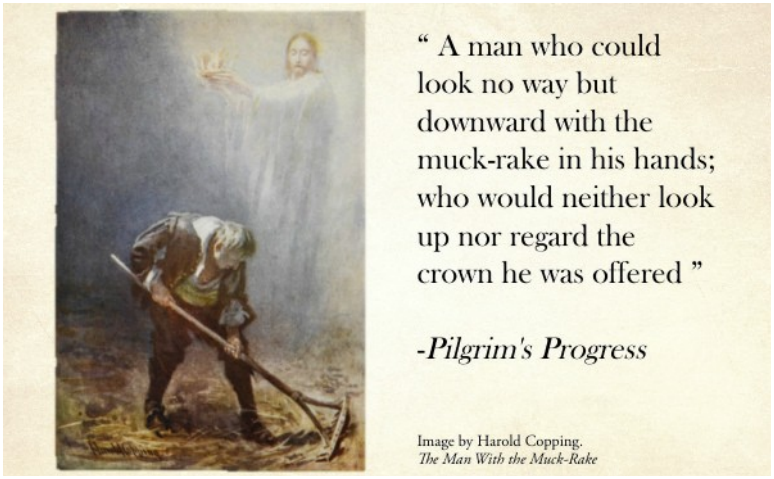
The struggles in this world are not corrected by God immediately, *Rev 9:20 The people who lived through these terrible troubles did not turn away from the idols they had made, and they did not stop worshiping demons. They kept on worshiping idols that were made of gold, silver, bronze, stone, and wood. Not one of these idols could see, hear, or walk. Rev 9:21 No one stopped murdering or practicing witchcraft or being immoral or stealing*. They are left to bring their evil fruit to fruition. *Mat 13:29 But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Mat 13:30 Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn*.

In the midst of this, the Christian suffers reproach, sometimes of his own making. He is despised like his Master, but he is working out his salvation in the evil surrounding him, *Php 2:12 Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. Php 2:13 For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure*.

What do you think that the Lord concerned with, is He concerned with the world of sin or those He will deliver from it? Do you think He is concerned about the politics of sinners or the triumph of the saints? Do you think He is concerned with who wins wars fought in His name by sinful men or the fight against sin in the life of the saint? Do you think He is concerned with the science and invention of men or the things blossoming in the reborn souls of His people? Do you think He is greatly concerned by what happens in the dreary streets of life or what will happen in the glorious golden streets of the Kingdom? This world is a sideshow, a distraction, from the main event.

If God were truly concerned for the world's people He has an unusual way of showing it. He has said, *Gen 8:22 While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease*. That takes care of the earth, but the people? They are doomed without

Christ. The climate, the disease, the hardship, the poverty, the degradation, the war, these are not the real issue that concern God.


" A man who could look no way but downward with the muck-rake in his hands; who would neither look up nor regard the crown he was offered "
-Pilgrim's Progress
Image by Harold Copping.
The Man With the Muck-Rake

We lack a perspective in all of this because we are blind, selfish and earth bound. We lack the vision of Christ, *Heb 12:1 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Heb 12:2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God*.

Stop looking down at the muck of this world and start looking up and forward. The past is past and the best is yet to come.

20. Was Mary a Levite? *Luke 3:16 - 22*

Luk 3:16 John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire: Luk 3:17 Whose fan is in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable. Luk 3:18 And many other things in his exhortation preached he unto the people. Luk 3:19 But Herod the tetrarch, being reproved by him for Herodias his brother Philip's wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done, Luk 3:20 Added yet this above all, that he shut up John in prison. Luk 3:21 Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, Luk 3:22 And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.

Summary so far: We have spent such a long time going through the early chapters of Luke, that we might be getting lost where the narrative is going. We have covered two major themes in Luke:

1. The birth of Jesus and John, and the events surrounding the births.

2. The start of Jesus' and John's ministry, looking in particular at the baptism of John and how he hands the ministry of the OT over to Jesus.

Today, as we close the ministry of beloved John, I want to tie a loose end up, and look at the genealogy of Mary.

The ministry of John draws to a close with these words, that the coming one, of whom he was unworthy even to undo His boot straps, was going to baptise His people with fire and the Spirit. That was not all, for He would gather them into His grain store after cleansing them, but the husks shall be burnt with fire. The chaff, the husks, can have two meanings. It can refer to the unbeliever who is the dross of humanity and will be burnt up continually with everlasting fire. It can also mean the dross in a believers life, *Rev 7:13 And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? Rev 7:14 And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Rev 7:15 Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them*. All of the worldliness will be taken from us.

John died for speaking his mind, not holding back on the adultery and evil Herod had committed, like speaking against our rotten leaders, like Boris Johnson and Joe Biden. Some are too afraid or too woke to speak out but it was not so for John and it cost him his life. We live in this world but are not of it but that does not mean we are silent to its evil deeds and we must speak to condemn its evils, even if it costs us our lives.

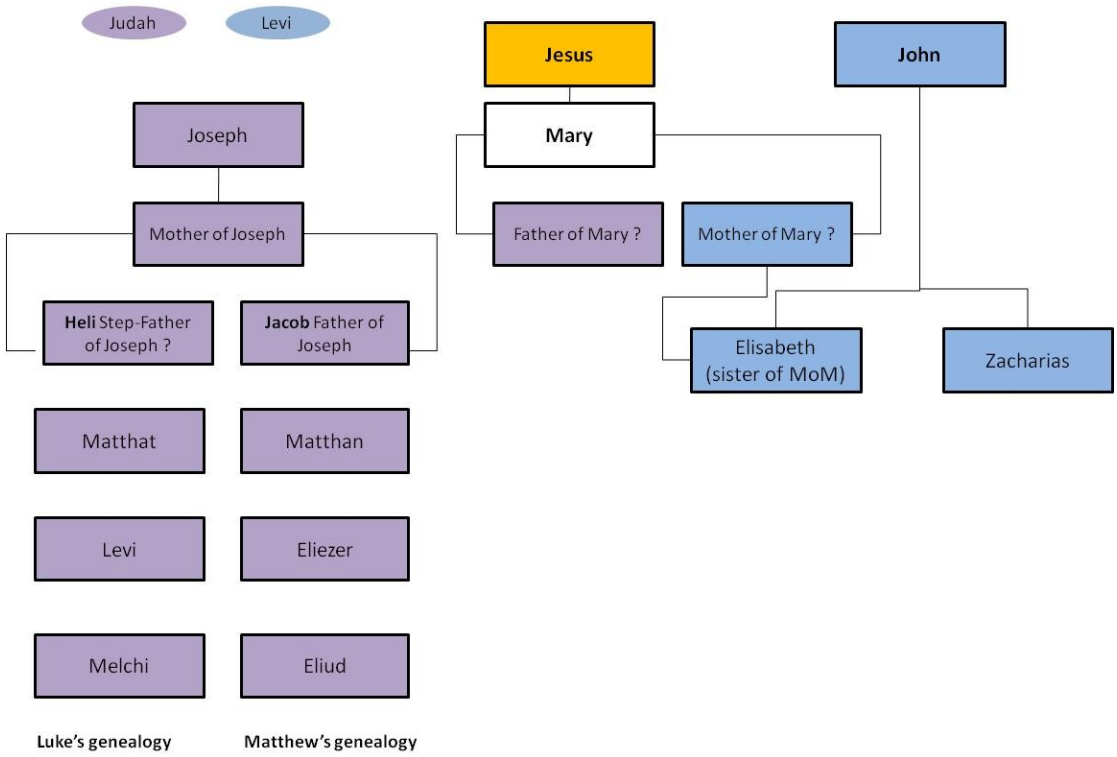
The messenger of God is silenced and the Son is announced, and a new chapter is declared, and it starts with a genealogy showing the line of Christ back to Adam. I have made a chart of what I think is the genealogy of Jesus earthly parents, and I would encourage you to keep it close during this study. (a brief description of the chart follows).

Matthew describes a similar genealogy but Mark and John think it unnecessary to their purpose and leave it out of their record. Whoever the genealogies of Matthew and Luke refer to, they are not **genetically** linked to Jesus through earthly fathers. I said not genetically, because Jesus is Son of God not of man, not of Joseph, and that perhaps is the reason Mark and John leave it out. The genealogies are similar but not the same as you will see from my chart, where Joseph has two "fathers". There must be something here, for so glaring a difference in the genealogies requires an explanation.

Although not **genetically** linked, there was a **legal** link. The purpose of the genealogy in Matthew's gospel is to demonstrate that Jesus is "the son of David,

the son of Abraham," that is, **the legal heir** of both of these men and thus the beneficiary (and ultimate fulfilment) of the covenant promises that God made to them. All Jews were descended from Abraham. But Jesus was not descended from David, who was from the tribe of Judah, through his mother Mary, because she was instead a descendant of Aaron from the tribe of Levi. We know this because Luke's gospel tells us that Mary was a "relative" of Elizabeth, who was a "descendant of Aaron."

But when Joseph, who was descended from David, married Mary, this also constituted his legal adoption of the son she would bear. The language of Matthew's genealogy reflects this legal understanding: "Joseph, the husband of Mary . . . the mother of Jesus."



Later in Matthew's gospel we see from the narrative that Jesus was considered to be Joseph's son just as much as the other children that Mary and Joseph had together. The people of Nazareth ask, after Jesus tells a series of parables, *Mat 13:55 Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? Mat 13:56 And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things?*

Paul can say of Jesus, at the beginning of his letter to the Romans, *Rom 1:3 Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; Rom 1:4 And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead*:

Luke says similarly, in his genealogy, that Jesus was reckoned, accounted, to be the son of Joseph, *Luk 3:23 And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of He*li. Jesus was reckoned to be the **son of Joseph via Heli** (Luke) and the **son of Joseph via Jacob** (Matthew). How can we reconcile this? I think we can and a possibility it is this. In Matthew's account, Joseph's father Jacob could have died and the mother of Joseph remarried Heli, as stated in Luke's account. Jacob died and Heli became Joseph's **step-father**, and the two fathers are both from the tribe of Judah. *Rom 1:3 Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; Rom 1:4 And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead:*

When you think about it, all we Christians are descended from the same germ line as Christ at some point. We all came from Adam and Eve in the beginning, as all of mankind did. Then we came through the flood as Noah's descendants and spread abroad into life. Each and every human came through Noah, and in a sense, having been first saved from the first Global judgement, the Flood, in our ancestors. We have a choice about whether we shall be saved by Christ from the final judgement.

Is it relevant to the Christian Gospel? The Christian believes, takes by faith, the fact that Jesus is God's Son and does not need proof, hence His Virgin Birth is not included in John's Gospel, which Gospel incidentally is a statement of faith, *Joh 20:30 And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: Joh 20:31 But **these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ**, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name*. Not a word about His birth to have life in His Name. Besides this the birth of Jesus speaks only of His **legal paternity** not His **true paternity**.

Why have these two paternities and why mention it? It could be something to do with Jeconiah. Jeconiah, also called "Jehoiachin", *2Ch 36:8 Now the rest of the acts of Jehoiakim, and his abominations which he did, and that which was found in him, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah: and Jehoiachin his son reigned in his stead. 2Ch 36:9 Jehoiachin was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned three months and ten days in Jerusalem: and he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD.*

He is also called "Coniah", *Jer 22:24 As I live, saith the LORD, though **Coniah the son of Jehoiakim** king of Judah were the signet upon my right hand, yet would I pluck thee thence; Jer 22:25 And I will give thee into the hand of them that seek thy life, and into the hand of them whose face thou fearest, even into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon, and into the hand of the Chaldeans. Jer 22:26 And I will cast thee out, and thy mother that bare thee, into another country, where ye were not born; and there shall ye die. Jer 22:27 But to*

the land whereunto they desire to return, thither shall they not return. Jer 22:28 Is this man Coniah a despised broken idol? is he a vessel wherein is no pleasure? wherefore are they cast out, he and his seed, and are cast into a land which they know not? Jer 22:29 O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the LORD. Jer 22:30 Thus saith the LORD, Write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days: ***for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah****.*

First, the LORD likens the king to a signet ring on God's hand—a ring that God will pull off (verse 24). Then, God pronounces a curse: "Record this man as if childless, a man who will not prosper in his lifetime, for none of his offspring will prosper, none will sit on the throne of David or rule anymore in Judah" (verse 30).

The problem is that the curse of Jeconiah seems to invalidate Jesus' right to the throne of David. The Davidic Covenant promised that the Messiah, the "Son of David," would reign forever on Jerusalem's throne, *1Ch 17:11 And it shall come to pass, when thy days be expired that thou must go to be with thy fathers, that I will raise up thy seed after thee, which shall be of thy sons; and I will establish his kingdom. 1Ch 17:12 He shall build me an house, and I will stablish his throne for ever. 1Ch 17:13 I will be his father, and he shall be my son: and I will not take my mercy away from him, as I took it from him that was before thee: 1Ch 17:14 But I will settle him in mine house and in my kingdom for ever: and his throne shall be established for evermore.*

The answer to the puzzle is found in the other paternity of Joseph, through Heli, which by-passes Jechoniah.

What about Mary's lineage? Mary has in Elisabeth a "near relation", Elisabeth, the mother of John the Baptist. Luke says that Mary was related to Elizabeth, who was in the tribe of Levi, *Luk 1:5 There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth*.

Mary was a relative, not a "cousin", as that word does not exist in the Greek, *Luk 1:36 And behold, Elisabeth thy kinswoman, she also hath conceived a son in her old age; and this is the sixth month with her that was called barren*. ASV. She is συγγενής = suggenēs, kinswomen, of the same genes we would say today. Mary was of the lineage of Aaron, a Levite, and of the lineage of Judah.

What of Mary's parents? We never hear of them in the Bible, were they dead? We do not know who Joseph's mother was either. Was Mary under Elizabeth's guardianship? At any event they seem quite close although separated by a large distance.

Mary would not have travelled much in those days other than for festivals and that was conducted in a large party of friends. We forget that travel was very restricted, even for people at the beginning of the last Century. Few people in England travelled, as this article shows, (The Difficulties of Travel and Transportation in Early 19th C. Britain):

> Back in Jane Austen's day travel was so difficult and laborious over poorly constructed roads that the majority of the people who lived in that century traveled no farther than 14 miles from where they lived. Most walked, and even so they had to contend with muddy roads that were almost impassible after heavy rains or breathe in choking dust during times of drought. (In cities, dusty streets would be watered down by merchants early in the morning.)
>
> Travel at night was dangerous. Without a widespread means of lighting roads or an organized police force, night travellers were at the mercy of highwaymen. In cities, link boys were paid a half pence to carry a light in front of pedestrians, or for those on horseback and in carriages. Lanterns hung in front of city doors or were carried. In the country, torches hung from trees lining a lane that led up to a house. Balls and parties were planned during the full moon, although a rainy or cloudy night would spoil these well-laid plans.
>
> The situation would not change until the Industrial Revolution brought about such life altering inventions as gas lights, macadam roads (whose hard surface facilitated smoother travel), the steamboat, and rail travel.

Travelling 80 miles to see her kinswomen Elizabeth was no mean feat in those far off days. But although it was in her power to tell the readers of her birth and circumstances, she remains respectfully silent, so we may look upon Jesus.

21. Jesus the scapegoat. *Luke 4:1 - 2*

Luk 4:1 And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, Luk 4:2 Being forty days tempted of the devil. And in those days he did eat nothing: and when they were ended, he afterward hungered. We have verses in Mark and Matthew which give a similar account. *Mar 1:12 And immediately the Spirit driveth him into the wilderness. Mar 1:13 And he was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan; and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered unto him……..Mat 4:1 Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil*.

Taking all three accounts together, we learn that Jesus was led by the Spirit, driven by the Spirit, for the purpose of proving Him for a period of forty days. This is another event that reminded me of the Day of Atonement. You recall that I linked Jesus baptism, His washing, with the Day of Atonement and the cleansing of the Tabernacle, of which He is a type. This type of Christ, which comes before us now, is that of **the scapegoat**, or "escape goat". It was the sacrifice for the children of Israel, *Lev 16:7 And he shall take the two goats, and present them before the LORD at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. Lev 16:8 And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats; one lot for the LORD, and the other lot for the scapegoat. Lev 16:9 And Aaron shall bring the goat upon which the LORD'S lot fell, and offer him for a sin offering. Lev 16:10 But the goat, on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat, shall be presented alive before the LORD, to make an* ***atonement with him****, and to let him go for a scapegoat into the wilderness…… Lev 16:21 And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness: Lev 16:22 And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited: and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness.*

The scapegoat formed one half of the sin offering of the people, *Lev 16:8 And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats; one lot for the LORD, and the other lot for the scapegoat.* The one who drew the short straw was killed, *Lev 16:9 And Aaron shall bring the goat upon which the LORD'S lot fell, and offer him for a sin offering.* The other goat was an atonement, and let go into the wilderness, *Lev 16:10 But the goat, on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat, shall be presented alive before the LORD, to make an* ***atonement with him****, and to let him go for a scapegoat into the wilderness.*

In Holman Hunt's painting of the Scapegoat there is a red thread wrapped around the head of the goat. This feature was added to the ritual during the Second Temple period. The scapegoat was tied with a crimson thread. While the Torah requires a crimson thread as part of the purification ritual for *tzaraʿat* (skin disease), leprosy, it does not mention it with the scapegoat. The Jews apparently thought that it must be pert of the ritual, because it involved two creatures, one killed and one released. And so the scapegoat was treated like the living bird in the cleansing of the leper.

Lev 14:4 Then shall the priest command to take for him that is to be cleansed two birds alive and clean, and cedar wood, and scarlet, and hyssop: Lev 14:5 And the priest shall command that one of the birds be killed in an earthen vessel over running water: Lev 14:6 As for the living bird, he shall take it, and the cedar wood, and the scarlet, and the hyssop, and shall dip them and the living bird in the blood of the bird that was killed over the running water: Lev 14:7 And he shall sprinkle upon him that is to be cleansed from the leprosy seven times, and shall pronounce him clean, and shall let the living bird loose into the open field.

The scapegoat showed that God dealt with sin and took it far away. The word for "scapegoat" in Hebrew is עֲזָאזֵל = azazel, meaning a "goat of departure". You may have heard the name Azazel used as the name of a fallen angel, which occurs in the book of Enoch. In the website Mythology.net, we are informed:

> Originally, Azazel was one of heaven's angels, a gloriously beautiful man with wings on his back. When he sympathized with Satan, he was cast down to earth and became one of the "fallen angels." Presumably, the evil that he spread as a fallen angel corrupted his beauty as well. By the time he became a major character in Jewish and Christian texts, he had taken on a demonic appearance.
>
> The Dead Sea Scrolls describe Azazel as a demon while the Apocalypse of Abraham describes him as a carrion bird, a serpent, and as a demon with "Hands and feet like a man's and on his back six wings on the right and six on the left."
>
> Today, like many demons, Azazel is drawn with red skin, glowing yellow eyes, and a barbed tail. He may also be found wearing goat skulls or dressed in goat bones, since Jewish desert tribes once sacrificed goats to him. From the start, Azazel was one of heaven's most powerful and clever angels. When God created man, Azazel revealed that he had a rebellious streak too, as he refused to bow to man and objected, "why should god create a human being, who will shed blood and confusion, while the angels prostrate before him and sing his glory day and night?"
>
> In response to this defiance, God cast Azazel and many other angels down to earth. The punishment didn't stop Azazel's rebellion. He became a leader of the Grigori, a group of angels who married mortal women and produced a line of monstrous children. Then, he began teaching evil to humans. He taught men the art of warfare and of weapon-making, and he taught women "the art of deception," which involved making and wearing cosmetics. Finally, he began teaching humans about witchcraft. His influence was so disastrous that, in the

> Book of Enoch, God says, "*The whole earth has been corrupted through the works that were taught by azazel: to him ascribe all sin."*
>
> In Judaism, for early Semitic tribes, Azazel (literally "strong one against God") was a very real force of evil. It was common for them to make sacrifices to Azazel at the same time that they made sacrifices to their god, Yahweh. As described in the Hebrew Bible, Azazel's sacrifices were made by driving a goat into the desert wilderness or by pushing it into a deep ravine. These sacrifices were not meant to honour Azazel as a deity; rather, they symbolized the people sending their sins back to their original source.

This is apocryphal, extra biblical and has nothing to do with the Scriptures. I read it because it shows how the teaching becomes distorted and almost unrecognisable from its original context and meaning. Azazel is a goat and no more, which derived its meaning in the Day of Atonement, which had 3 fold cleansing,

1. The High priest and his kin
2. The Holy place and the tabernacle
3. The children of Israel

    1. *Lev 16:6 And Aaron shall offer his bullock of the sin offering, which is for **himself**, and make an atonement for himself, and for **his house**.*
    2. *Lev 16:16 And he shall make an atonement for the **holy pla**ce, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions in all their sins: **and so shall he** do for the tabernacle of the congregation, that remaineth among them in the midst of their uncleanness.*
    3. *Lev 16:17 And there shall be no man in the tabernacle of the congregation when he goeth in to make an atonement in the holy place, until he come out, and have made an atonement for himself, and for his household, and **for all the congregation of Israel**.*

We Christians see the death of Christ as solely for us. We see in the types and shadows of the OT sacrifices, Christ's glory, stretched forth for us, paying the price for our sin, and in doing so, in being so utterly selfish, we do not see a greater truth. What about the Lord, how does it affect Him? What if no man believed, would Christ's death have occurred, would His death have been necessary?

Sin must be punished and if God does not take your sin, then you will and you will suffer its consequences forever in Hell. If all men had sinned and not been granted forgiveness, they would all endure the consequences of Hell. If all men were destined for hell, what of the effects that they have left behind them, the

results of sin? You punish the sinner but what happens to the legacy of his sin? All of God's creation is polluted with the effects of sin including the images, symbolism and artefacts related to the House of God, the Sanctuary of the Almighty. It soiled God.

How did the Almighty cope with this? Firstly we note that He is forbearing, His self-restraint holds Him back from acting so that He can show His righteousness, *Rom 3:23 for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Rom 3:24 being justified freely by his grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; Rom 3:25 whom God has set forth a mercy-seat, through faith in his blood, for the shewing forth of his righteousness, in respect of the passing by the sins that had taken place before,* ***through the forbearance of God****; Rom 3:26 for the shewing forth of his righteousness in the present time, so that he should be just, and justify him that is of the faith of Jesus*.

Secondly, He made provision for the pollution. It was not all about redeeming man it was about removing the stains left by man. It was removing the sin of man and here is how it was done. The Day of Atonement was the day of cleansing of the sins of the people that they had committed. If they accumulated, it made fellowship with God impossible. The sins accumulated, and it was it was by an Act of God, that He made provision for the cleansing of the fabric of the tabernacle, so that Fellowship would continue. **He made a sacrifice to clean the Sanctuary**, *Lev 16:15 Then let him put to death the goat of the sin-offering for the people, and take its blood inside the veil and do with it as he did with the blood of the ox, shaking drops of it on and before the cover of the ark. Lev 16:16 And let him make the holy place free from whatever is unclean among the children of Israel and from their wrongdoing in all their sins; and let him do the same for* ***the Tent of meeting, which has its place among an unclean people***. BBE.

This "spring clean" restored the Sanctuary, the Tabernacle, to its full functionality, free from the sins of man.

I remember as a child, being brought up in London, at how dismal and grimy it had become. The great buildings, some of the still scarred by the war, and in ruins, were dark and desolate. The great monuments, like the Natural History museum and the Science Museum were all covered with that black soot of a hundred thousand coal fires, leaving it all looking Dickensian and gloomy. In December of 1952 we had a "great smog", a smoke fog, where the air became trapped, like a dome, over the City by a temperature inversion, due to an area of high pressure. It lasted for about 5 days, during which the City slowly ground to a halt. So bad was the pollution that it killed at least 12,000 people.

A memory that I have retained from childhood, is of looking out of our windows at the street lamps, which at the time used mercury vapour bulbs. They normally

cast a bright bluish/white light, quite bright but it cast your skin colour in a ghoulish hue. The smog turned the white light into a dark green pea soup colour, and the emptiness of the streets gave everywhere the look of a graveyard. This of course was the wake up call to a smoke free city, and over the years London became cleaner and fresher, and those old treasured buildings became clean, and bright, as they were first built.

The Tabernacle, God's sanctuary, was like those buildings in London, but instead of being covered with soot, it was covered with sin, the sins of the people. It did not just rely on the animal sacrifice for sin to be removed, a passive act on behalf of the people, an almost mechanical, unthinking act. It required an act of contrition, *Lev 16:29 And this shall be a statute for ever unto you: that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, ye shall* ***afflict your souls****, and do no work at all, whether it be one of your own country, or a stranger that sojourneth among you*:

This act of contrition was marked with a Sabbath of rest. The word "afflict" (עָנָה = aw-naw') comes from the idea of *looking* down or browbeating, abasing oneself, chastening oneself. In other words, the sacrifice was carried out in parallel with personal affliction, a time for reflection on the wrong which you committed that had led to the sacrifice. You had to give thought to your ways, and you did this every year, year on year.

I do not see those of us "Christians" taking the same trouble over their sin as they did on the Day of Atonement. The NT Christians have got the idea that the "one offering" of Christ, means that we are forgiven and all sin is removed at once and all thought about it is unnecessary. No, sin is still present in you, *1Jn 1:7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. 1Jn 1:8 If we say* ***that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*** *1Jn 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1Jn 1:10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us*.

"One offering" does not mean that we do not keep going back for forgiveness and that we should no longer think about the acts that lead to our sinning. To the contrary, the Christian life is one of continuing confession of our sins and continual forgiveness through the blood of Christ. His sacrifice for sin was a "once and for all time" offering, but the blood is applied many times and we should not become complacent and forget that. There must be a continual reflection upon our way that we go with Christ, and that guide must be the Spirit and the Word.

This two part sacrifice showed that God not only made an offering for sins but that He also removed sin from memory by sending it far away, *Jer 31:33 But this*

shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. Jer 31:34 And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and ***I will remember their sin no more*****.**

This leads me on to the subject of pleading in evangelism. What if men do not accept our message, they regard it as foolish, do we keep on pleading with them? It is the position where many Christians use the emotional appeal to the senses, and are like a dog with a bone, going on and on, trying to bite the person and provoke them to make a decision for Christ. The person obviously does not want to come and the matter should be left to rest. Do you find Jesus begging men to come? With the rich ruler, He loved him, but He did not continue the conversation, *Mar 10:21 Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me. Mar 10:22 And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions.*

The sacrifice is made ready, the invitations have been sent out for the feast and if you do not want to come, there are plenty who will, *Luk 14:21 So that servant came, and shewed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. Luk 14:22 And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. Luk 14:23 And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. Luk 14:24 For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.*

If I have spoken the truth of the Gospel, then I must let it do its work. Some people will respond and some will not and I must be content with that. But what Gospel do you teach? How do you set forth Christ from the beginning to the end of the Scriptures? You say to me, “How are Christians expected to know the OT law” surely the NT is sufficient? It is not, because Christ is in the OT, typically and physically and it is just that attitude of neglect, that laziness that has led to a decline in the ability to defend the faith.

22. The temptations of Christ. *Luke 4:2 - 13*

Luk 4:2 Being forty days tempted of the devil. And in those days he did eat nothing: and when they were ended, he afterward hungered. Luk 4:3 And the devil said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be

made bread. Luk 4:4 And Jesus answered him, saying, ***It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God****. Luk 4:5 And the devil, taking him up into an high mountain, shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. Luk 4:6 And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. Luk 4:7 If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine. Luk 4:8 And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for* ***it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.*** *Luk 4:9 And he brought him to Jerusalem, and set him on a pinnacle of the temple, and said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence: Luk 4:10 For it is written, He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee: Luk 4:11 And in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Luk 4:12 And Jesus answering said unto him, It* ***is said, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.*** *Luk 4:13 And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season.*

Where did Luke get this story? If Jesus was alone in the wilderness, how come we get this story? It could be directly from the Author of all Scripture, the Spirit, it could have been told by Jesus to a disciple, or it could be that Jesus told it to Mary. The source is a mystery and to think too long on that topic is to miss the bigger picture of what the message is here.

Who is behind evil? With our unseeing eyes, we say that man is responsible for wars, disease, famines and death, but we would be wrong. There is in that un-talked of spirit world, a person who is waging a war on humanity, in an attempt to subvert the persons of the Godhead. There are spiritual battles unfolding, and although the battleground is the soul of man, the source is the devil and his angels.

Rev 12:7 And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, Rev 12:8 And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. Rev 12:9 And ***the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.*** *Rev 12:10 And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. Rev 12:11 And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.* This has already happened for satan is called the god of this world, *2Co 4:3 But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: 2Co 4:4 In whom* ***the god of this world*** *hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.*

In the corrupt world all men are equally culpable, and who is better than another? Christians are from the same mould, the “generation of vipers”, and they too suffer with the world. That is why it is hypocritical to support one side, one country, over another in wars, they are all condemned. Ukraine is only slightly better than the Russians on the corruption index, and they both have a history of corrupt leaders, just like Britain. We should avoid being partisan and support Christ and Him alone.

It is a reality we should ever have in mind, *Eph 6:12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.* A glimpse of this is given in the book of Daniel, *Dan 10:12 Then said he unto me, Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words. Dan 10:13 But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days: but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with the kings of Persia.*

We should not forget that “evil” is not just a principle that runs through human life, it has a face, the face of satan and with him the devils of hell. Strangely the sect called Christadelphians do not believe in a personal devil called satan, as this article be Thomas Farrar points out:

> One of the most distinctive doctrines of the Christadelphian community is their understanding of the devil and satan – that is, their satanology. While the Birmingham Amended Statement of Faith (the most widely used Christadelphian confessional document) does not spell out Christadelphian satanology, it does include “that the devil is a supernatural being” among its doctrines to be rejected. As the Statement of Faith has historically been used as a test of fellowship, those who believe that the devil is a supernatural being are officially unable to become members of a Christadelphian ecclesia or participate in a Christadelphian breaking of bread service.

That is one of the first deceits of satan, a denial that he even exists. Denial is the first reply of the of the guilty politician. I would not mention it, since the doctrine of a personal devil “has been the near-unanimous consensus of the church throughout its history” but for the fact that it reveals the lengths that these unfortunate sects go to in order to be different from orthodoxy. The plain reading of Scripture shows that he is a person, with a kingdom, *Luk 11:17 But he, knowing their thoughts, said unto them, Every **kingdom** divided against itself is brought to desolation; and a house divided against a house falleth. Luk 11:18 If Satan (**ο σατανας**) also be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom*

stand? because ye say that I cast out devils through Beelzebub. And you will note the definite article placed before satan, ***ο σατανας***, making him a person not a principle.

Was Jesus only tempted here or was it all His life, and if it was all His life what is so special here? Was He tempted as a child, as a young man years before? Yes He was, and we know of one event in the Temple, when He said, *Luk 2:48 And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing. Luk 2:49 And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business*? Joseph's attitude is similar to Peter's, *Mar 8:31 And he began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. Mar 8:32 And he spake that saying openly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him. Mar 8:33 But when he had turned about and looked on his disciples, he rebuked Peter, saying, Get thee behind me, Satan: **for thou savourest not the things that be of God**, but the things that be of men*. Jesus must always be about God's business.

He was tempted all His life, *Heb 4:15 For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin*. Even at His death He was tempted, *Mat 27:39 And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, Mat 27:40 And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Mat 27:41 Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, Mat 27:42 He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. Mat 27:43 He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God. Mat 27:44 The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth.*

Why mention these three particular temptations that occurred during the forty days of temptation?

1. Stones to Bread
2. Worship the devil
3. Throw yourself off the Temple

What is the purpose of the Temptations? You could have recorded thousands of temptations, but it is only three that are mentioned. Let's get into our 1st Century Jewish mode of thinking. What is the thing that might come readily to mind if we were with them in the 1st Century? Surely it all looks a bit like a repeat of the book of Deuteronomy? The conformity to the book of Deuteronomy, the second law giving, is remarkable.

You remember that this book was written on the eve of entry into the Promised Land, *Deu 1:1 These be the words which Moses spake unto all Israel on this side Jordan in the wilderness, in the plain over against the Red sea, between Paran, and Tophel, and Laban, and Hazeroth, and Dizahab. Deu 1:2 (There are eleven days' journey from Horeb by the way of mount Seir unto Kadeshbarnea.) Deu 1:3 And it came to pass* ***in the fortieth year, in the eleventh month, on the first day of the month****, that Moses spake unto the children of Israel, according unto all that the LORD had given him in commandment unto them*. The forty days of Jesus is also typical of the forty days when Moses went up into the mountain to get the law.

The temptation on the high mountain also has its parallel in the story of the death of Moses, his sight of the Promised Land but not his entry, *Deu 34:1 Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Mount Pisgah east of Jericho, and there the LORD showed him the whole land: the territory of Gilead as far north as the town of Dan; Deu 34:2 the entire territory of Naphtali; the territories of Ephraim and Manasseh; the territory of Judah as far west as the Mediterranean Sea; Deu 34:3 the southern part of Judah; and the plain that reaches from Zoar to Jericho, the city of palm trees. Deu 34:4 Then the LORD said to Moses, "This is the land that I promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob* ***I would give to their descendants****. I have let you see it,* ***but I will not let you go ther****e."* GNB.

Moses saw the land but he did not enter it. Jesus saw it and entered it, but it was not the earthly land of Israel He entered. On the eve of Jesus leading the people out of the land, from Israel below to Israel above, to heaven, He is put to the test to show He is worthy. We most certainly are **not** worthy, so one must take the leadership for us and show He is worthy, *Rev 5:9 They sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to break open its seals. For you were killed, and by your sacrificial death you bought for God people from every tribe, language, nation, and race. Rev 5:10 You have made them a kingdom of priests to serve our God, and they shall rule on earth."*

In a sense, the temptations summarise the history of Israel, as a reminder, that if you go with Christ into the Promised Land, the Kingdom of God, you must remember these things and do them, because they are the rules, they are Scripture.

Jesus undergoes temptation for His people, because **Jesus is Israel,** the body of believers, *Col 1:24 Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church*.

The three passages Jesus refers to are:

1. *Deu 8:3 And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but* ***by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live****.*
2. *Deu 6:12 Then beware lest thou forget the LORD, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. Deu 6:13* ***Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name****.*
3. *Deu 6:14 Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which are round about you; Deu 6:15 (For the LORD thy God is a jealous God among you) lest the anger of the LORD thy God be kindled against thee, and destroy thee from off the face of the earth. Deu 6:16* ***Ye shall not tempt the LORD your God, as ye tempted him in Massah****.*

The words that Jesus' uses to rebuke satan are a remarkable summary of the first three of the 10 commandments, dealing with mankind's attitude to God, *Exo 20:1 And God spake all these words, saying, Exo 20:2 I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Exo 20:3* ***Thou shalt have no other gods before me****. Exo 20:4 Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Exo 20:5* ***Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me****; Exo 20:6 And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments. Exo 20:7* ***Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain****; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.*

At the end of forty days, when the flesh is at its frailest, our Saviour is put to the ultimate test. Will He be worn down, will He capitulate? The Angels watch, unable to help, being constrained by the Father, for this is another instance of Him bearing the test on His own, and only when the devil leaves Him will they minister, *Mat 4:11 Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.* Even in the garden of Gethsemane, the angel strengthened Him, but not in the Temptation, *Luk 22:41 And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, uk 22:42 Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done. Luk 22:43 And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him*.

We Christians always seem to leave the temptations to Jesus in our modern age. By that I mean, we are happy to take the forgiveness but loath to have the

temptations. We view what other people do, their sins, and say, “I am not as bad as them” and so do not look at our own sins. As a result, we are less concerned with our sins, we do not seek them out, we do not spend time in self examination, we are complacent and do not even recognise when we are being tempted.

An example of this type of behaviour is the way we hold on to other peoples sins and do not exercise the slightest bit of forgiveness. We might want forgiveness but we cannot give forgiveness to others. We spend time looking at the other persons sins and are blind to our own. We see ourselves as righteous and other men beyond redemption. But we are like the Laodicean’s, in need of treatment, *Rev 3:18 I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see*.

These people, the people who cannot forgive, who continue to bear grudges, who continue to hold matters against you, are remarkable individuals, for they have found a way of getting personal forgiveness without having to give it. They have broken that Divine linkage or **so they think**, the connection between forgiving and being forgiven. I must ask you, how does it work, how can you be forgiven, how can your sins be washed when you have hatred in your heart against your brother.

But the two go together and only the fool thinks that they do not. Listen to what the Lord says, *Mat 18:32 Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Mat 18:33 Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? Mat 18:34 And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. Mat 18:35 So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses*.

The Lord Jesus took on Himself the task of forgiving His people, by undergoing temptation to show His worth, enduring the opposition of sinners, suffering death on the Cross that we might obtain life everlasting. And if He endured so much for us, why is it that we cannot even get off of our high horses and forgive one another?

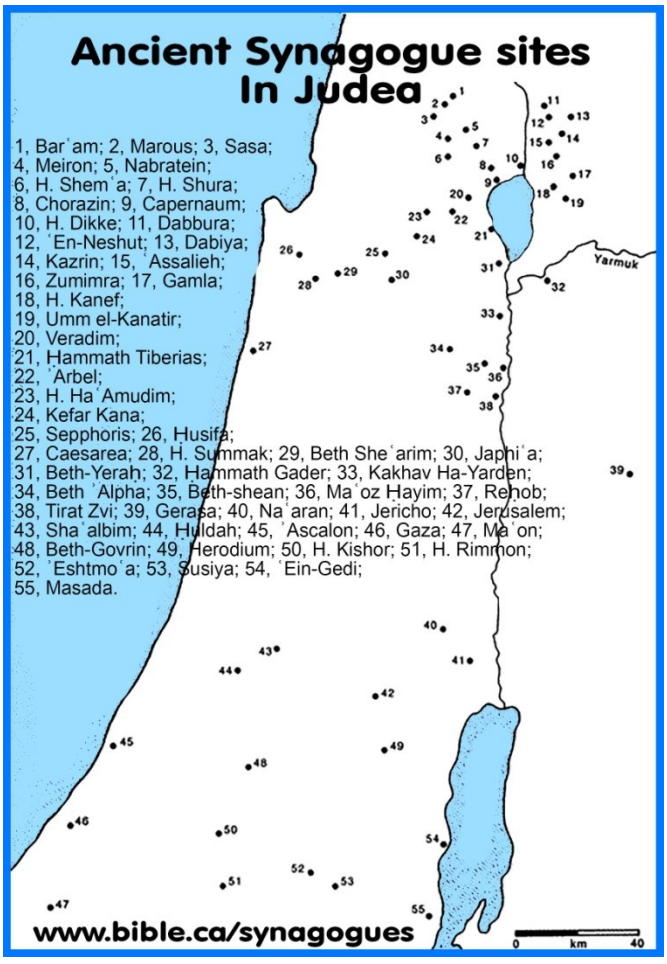
Therein will be found a proof of life in you. It is a touchstone of spiritual life and it is found in the ability to forgive others, *Luk 7:47 Wherefore I say unto thee, **Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much**: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. Luk 7:48 And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven.* It is found in the love of God.

23. The ministry of Jesus begins. *Luke 4:14 - 15*

Luk 4:14 And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about. Luk 4:15 And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all.

We note that Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit undefeated

His region for the advance of the Gospel was Galilee and His means initially was in the Synagogues. The synagogue is a place for gathering together, probably started about the time of the captivity, for the reading of the Scriptures and worship. The oldest dated evidence of a synagogue is from the 3rd century B.C., but synagogues doubtless have an older history. Some scholars think that the destruction of Solomon's Temple of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. gave rise to synagogues after private homes were temporarily used for public worship and religious instruction.


Ancient Synagogue sites In Judea
1, Bar'am; 2, Marous; 3, Sasa;
4, Meiron; 5, Nabratein;
6, H. Shem'a; 7, H. Shura;
8, Chorazin; 9, Capernaum;
10, H. Dikke; 11, Dabbura;
12, 'En-Neshut; 13, Dabiya;
14, Kazrin; 15, 'Assalieh;
16, Zumimra; 17, Gamla;
18, H. Kanef;
19, Umm el-Kanatir;
20, Veradim;
21, Hammath Tiberias;
22, 'Arbel;
23, H. Ha'Amudim;
24, Kefar Kana;
25, Sepphoris; 26, Husifa;
27, Caesarea; 28, H. Summak; 29, Beth She'arim; 30, Japhi'a;
31, Beth-Yerah; 32, Hammath Gader; 33, Kakhav Ha-Yarden;
34, Beth 'Alpha; 35, Beth-shean; 36, Ma'oz Hayim; 37, Rehob;
38, Tirat Zvi; 39, Gerasa; 40, Na'aran; 41, Jericho; 42, Jerusalem;
43, Sha'albim; 44, Huldah; 45, 'Ascalon; 46, Gaza; 47, Ma'on;
48, Beth-Govrin; 49, Herodium; 50, H. Kishor; 51, H. Rimmon;
52, 'Eshtmo'a; 53, Susiya; 54, 'Ein-Gedi;
55, Masada.
Yarmuk
www.bible.ca/synagogues
0 km 40

Strangely, the earliest archaeological evidence for the existence of very early synagogues comes from **Egypt**, where stone synagogue dedication inscriptions dating from the 3rd century BC prove that synagogues existed by that date.

They are a bit like a “church” building which the people used because the Temple was in such disrepair and ravaged. In Magdala, a stone (Magdala Stone) a reminder of the Temple in Jerusalem, was found. The people regrouped and set up worship where they lived. I imagine that there were two constraints governing the formation of Synagogues.

1. The difficulty in obtaining manuscripts of the Scriptures and literacy rates,
2. The convenience of a communal worship and fellowship.

Jesus in going to the Synagogues was neither condoning them nor condemning them. He makes no comment about the legitimacy of them, in fact He tells the woman in Samaria, that worship is neither here nor there, but in Spirit and truth, *Joh 4:23 But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall*

worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. Joh 4:24 God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. He does however use them as a platform to launch the Gospel.

Our map shows that there were a lot of Synagogues, and some are not even shown, like the two in Magdala north of Tiberias. I think more will be found as archaeology in Israel becomes more widespread. Now if Jesus spoke in **ALL** their Synagogues on the Sabbath, I can imagine that His ministry lasted more than three years. If He spoke in some of them the ministry can be compacted. For example if He spoke in a region, attracting people to a hub, a town, He could have reduced the amount of travel but it is not clear how He did this.

Do you think that Jesus said different things in each of the Synagogues He taught in? Was it just "speaking", giving a talk, a bit like the occasional ministries on different topics that have become so common in modern evangelicalism. There is rarely a single topic, exhausted by the preacher, for example, M L Jones wrote and preached a whole book on each chapter of the book of Romans. Preaching has become less to do with proclaiming the Word of God and more with filling a slot on Sunday morning and tickling men's ears. They say something that will leave people comfortable, at ease with themselves, well pleased with themselves, and they try not to upset them with their words. How different is Jesus preaching for He induces a reaction, like John.

What did Jesus say? *Luk 4:16 And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read*.

First let us try to get a feel for what passed for worship in Jesus day. I imagine you have an idea that you got from pictures of Jewish synagogues, or from perhaps the Jesus films. Jesus sits with a head covering which He puts on when He prays or reads the word of God. The Torah scrolls are worshipped, and various incantations are made by singers in the congregation. All this is of course 20th Century Judaism fed back in time to Jesus day. It is retro-engineering the past, from what we have in the present. I suppose that Judaism of the time of Jesus bears as much resemblance to Jewishness today, as True Christianity of the first century bears to the church of England. All the baggage, junk and clutter dragged by the exposure to time, has obscured what was there then.

What does the Bible say? Let us look at a few of the Jewish traditions.

A yarmulke (Yiddish) or Kippah (Hebrew) is a small cloth cap worn by Jews. Traditionally it was worn only by men, but in modern times the push for equality between the sexes in the practice of Judaism has led some women to wear yarmulkes. Some Jews only wear yarmulkes while praying; others wear

yarmulkes the entire day, making sure not to walk more than four cubits without head covering (especially outside). Often, the colour and fabric of the yarmulke can be a sign of adherence to a specific religious movement. The Israeli Religious Zionist community is often referred to by the name kipot srugot, literally “woven yarmulkes”.

The etymology of yarmulke is unclear. The Yiddish word is derived (via Ukrainian or Polish) from the Turkic ya?murluk, meaning ‘rainwear’. Other linguists (e.g. Herbert Zeiden) regard this hypothesis as untenable but still believe a Turkic origin is likely, suggesting that the first part of the word may come from yarim, a Turkic adjective meaning ‘half’, while the second part may come from qap, a Turkic word for ‘cap’, ‘shell’, ‘enclosure’, or ‘container’.

Traditionally, yarmulke is considered to have originated from the Aramaic phrase “yarei mei-elokah” (in awe of the Lord), in keeping with the principle that the yarmulke is supposed to reflect someone’s fear of heaven. Or perhaps, “yira malkah” (fear of the King). In Hebrew language, the word “Kippah” means dome, the way, a person expresses that “God (Shekhina) dwells above my head”. In the Middle Ages in Europe, the distinctive Jewish headgear was the Jewish hat, a full hat with a brim and a central point or stalk. Originally used by choice among Jews to distinguish themselves, it was later made compulsory by Christian governments needed in some places as a discriminatory measure. In the early 19th century in the United States, rabbis often wore a scholar's cap (large saucer-shaped caps of cloth, like a beret) or a Chinese skullcap. Other Jews of this era wore black pillbox-shaped kippot.

Often, the colour and fabric of the kippah can be a sign of adherence to a specific religious movement, particularly in Israel. Knitted or crocheted kippot, known as kippot serugot, are usually worn by Religious Zionists and the Modern Orthodox. They also wear suede or leather kippot. Knitted kippot were first made in the late 1940s, and became popular after being worn by Rabbi Moshe-Zvi Neria. Members of most Haredi groups wear black velvet or cloth kippot.

Tallit , in Judaism, four-cornered, fringed shawl worn by males during the morning prayers. It is donned before putting on the phylacteries, except on Yom Kippur when it is worn all through the day (phylacteries are not worn on this day). The tallit is usually made of white wool, cotton, or silk, and often has blue or black stripes on the ends and an ornamental strip worn near the neck. Woven into the white garment is a blue fringe (tzitzit), worn in fulfillment of the biblical commandment (Num. 15.37–41).

> The original tallit probably resembled the "'abayah," or blanket, worn by the Bedouins for protection from sun and rain, and which has black stripes at the ends. The finer tallit, very likely, was similar in quality to the Roman pallium, and was worn only by distinguished men, rabbis, and scholars (B. B. 98a;Midrash Genesis Rabbah xxxvi.; Midrash Exodus Rabbah xxvii.). The tallit was sometimes worn partly doubled, and sometimes with the ends thrown over the shoulders (Talmud references Shab. 147a; Men. 41a).

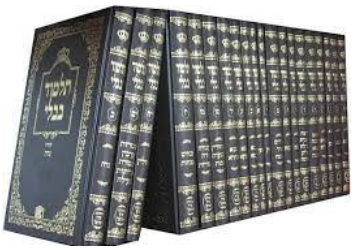
You can see that the wearing if these garments is largely down to the non-Biblical sources, like the Talmud. The nearest to a biblical authority is, *Num 15:38 Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a ribband of blue: Num 15:39 And it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the LORD, and do them; and that ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye use to go a whoring: Num 15:40 That ye may remember, and do all my commandments, and be holy unto your God.* This incidentally follows the judicial execution of the Sabbath breaker by stoning.

Fringe was not necessarily for a shawl, but for their garments, which, if you think about it, meant that they walked metaphorically within the circle 0f the law.

Head coverings were not prescribed. Head covering was a sign of mourning, *2Sa 15:29 Zadok therefore and Abiathar carried the ark of God again to Jerusalem: and they tarried there. 2Sa 15:30 And David went up by the ascent of mount Olivet, and wept as he went up, and had his head covered, and he went barefoot: and all the people that was with him covered every man his head, and they went up, weeping as they went up*.

Moses covered his face not head, and because one person does something, in the absence of the command "go thou and do likewise", there is no grounds for copying him, *Exo 34:33 And till Moses had done speaking with them, he put a vail on his face. Exo 34:34 But when Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he took the vail off, until he came out. And he came out, and spake unto the children of Israel that which he was commanded. Exo 34:35 And the children of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone: and Moses put the vail upon his face again, until he went in to speak with him*.

Men praying and prophesying with there heads covered, is says Paul, dishonouring, *1Co 11:4 Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head. 1Co 11:5 But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven*.



I do not think that Paul invented this teaching, that it was for NT times and not OT times, but it was handed down to him by the Jews, and it was not objected to on the grounds that it was new or contrary to doctrine. It was also a creation ordinance, *1Co 11:7 For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man.* ***1Co 11:8*** *For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. 1Co 11:9 Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man. 1Co 11:10 For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels*.

Jesus did not wear a head covering for religious purposes and the portrayal of Him doing so has no warrant from the Bible, it is in the imagination of painters and filmmakers.

The Jews also invented whole books, library's of man made explanations of the Law, that men follow, and yet there is not one of the men that write says "thus says The Lord". And none of the men that follow these blind guides ask questions of them. The just drink in the poison. **Observe that the Scripture is the only literature that Christ used**.

The Star of David, or hexagram, is also a late addition to tradition of both the Jews and Christians. The hexagram, being an inherently simple geometric construction, has been used in various motifs throughout human history, which were not exclusively religious. It appeared as a decorative motive in both 4th-century synagogues and Christian churches in the Galilee region. In early Medieval times, the hexagram became important in Middle Eastern art under the name of "Seal of Solomon". At around the same time, Jewish Kabbalists had adopted it for use in talismanic protective amulets (segulot). The change of name, from "Seal of Solomon" to "Shield of David" (and later "Star of David"), may have originated in either Islamic or Jewish mystical works. Only around one millennium later, however, the star would begin to be used as a symbol to identify Jewish communities, a tradition that seems to have started in Prague before the 17th century, and from there spread to much of Eastern Europe.

In the 19th century, it came to be adopted by European Jews as a symbol to represent Jewish religion or identity in the same manner the Christian cross identified that religion's believers. The symbol became representative of the worldwide Zionist community after it was chosen as the central symbol on a flag at the First Zionist Congress in 1897, due to its usage in some Jewish communities and its lack of specifically religious connotations. It was not considered an exclusively Jewish symbol until after it began to be used on the gravestones of fallen Jewish soldiers in World War I. And so another ancient myth of Judaism is seen to be of fairly recent observation.

Much of what we see in Judaism, are in fact, the inventions of men, perhaps well meaning men, sincere men, but men none the less. It is like the traditions of the CoE, not given to man by God, but invented by man, and the traditions isolate him from his God. It is a terrible thing when men distort religion, because they are distorting the image of God, *Mat 23:15 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves*.

De-clutter Judaism and you might have something like Judaism in Jesus day. I imagine this is what the early Brethren did to Anglicanism, what the early Baptists did to Presbyterianism, and what the Moravians did to the Roman Catholics. They got back to basics, de-cluttering, so that they could see clearly what was important.

There was one major problem and that was that the scribes and Pharisees were making inroads into the system. *Luk 6:6 And it came to pass also on another sabbath, that he entered into the synagogue and taught: and there was a man whose right hand was withered. Luk 6:7 And the scribes and Pharisees watched him, whether he would heal on the sabbath day; that they might find an accusation against him*.

24. The Spirit of the Lord. *Luke 4:16 - 17*

We have seen a little of the synagogue worship and what it eventually became, smothered with the traditions of men. But in those far off days, there was a semblance of freedom. We see Jesus going into His home Synagogue in Nazareth unencumbered by tradition and freely reading the Scripture there, *Luk 4:16 And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. Luk 4:17 And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written*.

There was freedom to read and there was freedom to expound the passage that He read from, and I think that this courtesy to Him was extended to all who entered the Synagogue. There was no standing on ceremony, and if you had something to say, you could say it. After all, it was a Synagogue, a place for the gathering of the people together, like the Church gathering, *1Co 14:26 How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying*. The only proviso was that there had to be a decency and order in the proceeding.

We read that Jesus spoke in the Synagogues of Galilee, but it does not appear that He spoke at Nazareth first, *Luk 4:14 And Jesus returned in the power of the*

Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about. Luk 4:15 And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all. Luk 4:16 And ***he came to Nazareth***. He was doing a circuit, evangelising, getting the message out there and in the process He came to Nazareth, His home town. I think it is recorded by Luke, for this very fact. It is a window into how those that knew him responded to His message.

What was the message that He gave? Like many evangelists, Jesus has a global message, and it may differ slightly from preacher to preacher but it is a message from God. Take for example, the evangelist George Whitfield who preached over 20,000 sermons to audiences that were very large. George Whitefield was the most spectacular preacher of the Great Awakening in Britain and America, drawing revival audiences reported in the tens of thousands. What historians call "the first Great Awakening" can best be described as a revitalization of religious piety that swept through the American colonies between the 1730s and the 1770s.

News accounts of these meetings drew the attention of many, including Whitefield's friend and publisher, Benjamin Franklin of Philadelphia. Benjamin Franklin, polymath and founding father of the American declaration of independence, attended a revival meeting in Philadelphia in Pennsylvania and was greatly impressed with Whitefield's ability to deliver a message to such a large group. Franklin had previously dismissed as exaggeration reports of Whitefield preaching to crowds of the order of tens of thousands in England.

When listening to Whitefield preaching from the Philadelphia court house, Franklin walked away towards his shop in Market Street until he could no longer hear Whitefield distinctly. Whitefield could be heard over 500 feet. He then estimated his distance from Whitefield and calculated the area of a semicircle centred on Whitefield. Allowing two square feet per person he computed that Whitefield could be heard by over 30,000 people in the open air.

His ability to speak to crowds of people were legendary, but what was the topic that he spoke of the most? It was the subject of **the New Birth**, an essential for entry into Heaven. He spoke of the New Birth in one third of his ministries that is some 6,000 plus times. There was no need for a different message because it was right for people who had got into the habit of religion, been christened into a church, and thought they were God's own people. They needed to know about the New Birth and Whitfield told them about it.

My belief is that Jesus told the people of His day the message of most importance for the times that God had laid upon His heart, ***Luk 4:18 The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind,***

to set at liberty them that are bruised, Luk 4:19 To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

He told His message in all the Synagogues, and here at Nazareth it is told, for the first time in Nazareth, but not the first time ever. It was but one of many times He told it, *Luk 4:23 And he said unto them, Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself:* ***whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum****, do also here in thy country.* He clearly spoke in Capernaum **before** He came and spoke in Nazareth and He clearly did wonders there in Capernaum that He did not do in Nazareth.

The message of Jesus was clear to every Synagogue that He preached in, it was the same message, with no uncertainty. Why then is Nazareth singled out for a mention? It gives a reaction to the message, from the very heart of where He was bought up. It shows how the people who knew Him saw Him, and how they treated Him, *Mar 6:2 The next Sabbath he taught in the Jewish meeting place. Many of the people who heard him were amazed and asked, "How can he do all this? Where did he get such wisdom and the power to work these miracles? Mar 6:3 Isn't he the carpenter, the son of Mary? Aren't James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon his brothers? Don't his sisters still live here in our town?" The people were very unhappy because of what he was doing. Mar 6:4 But Jesus said, "Prophets are honored by everyone,* ***except the people of their hometown and their relatives and their own family.***" CEV.

Not now the surprise of the elders in Jerusalem, when the 12 year old prodigy spoke, no astonishment at His questions and answers, this time there was anger, *Luk 4:22 And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son? Luk 4:23 And he said unto them, Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself: whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in thy country. Luk 4:24 And he said, Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country*.

What was the message that so upset this “bible based” meeting in Nazareth so much? The written word often upsets people who are not religious but religious people like hearing it. I call this the “pure word” and it differs from the “applied word” in its effects. The pure word may make demands which can go unheeded, in one ear and out of the other, like some idle tune that you sing or hum, that is pleasant but meaningless.

When Jesus spoke from Scripture, the pure word, it was a delight, sweet in the mouth, but when it got into them it was bitter. ***“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the***

captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord."

So far so good, but what about the application of this word, the **applied word**? Ah, that is what got to them, the applied word and that is just what gets people today, those people who sit in pews, who only want to be told something comfortable, agreeable to their own tastes. It is when that word requires action, when you see that it has an application to you that you do not like, then you get angry.

It started gradually, in their minds, when Jesus spoke to them and they thought, "Who is this telling us these things, we don't have to listen to Him. He is just in much of need of help as we are". These people did not see Jesus for who he was. So Jesus gave their words form and He says, *Luk 4:23 And he said unto them, Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself: whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in thy country.* They questioned His authority, tantamount to saying, "by what authority do you say these things". To them He was an equal and why is He freeing captives and healing the sick, when He needs healing too.

They were too proud and too prejudiced to see Jesus for what He was, too familiar with Him, *Luk 4:24 And he said, Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country. Luk 4:25 But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; Luk 4:26 But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. Luk 4:27 And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian.*

Now this is the thing, Jesus gives an illustration of what He is saying and to whom it applies, taken from the life of **Elijah** and **Elisha**. This was a low point in the history of Israel (not Judah). Israel had a wicked King, Ahab, made worse by his consort, the power behind the throne, the notorious Jezebel. Faith was at a low ebb, believers were in fear of their lives, even Elijah wobbled, thinking that he was alone, so the Lord took him aside and said to him, *1Ki 19:18 Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him*.

In the midst of all this turmoil the prophet Elijah is sent to Zarephath in Sidon, which is in the Lebanon, to a poor widow who provides miracle food for the prophet. **She is a gentile.**

Elisha cleanses the leper Naaman, who is a general in the armies of Syria. **He is a gentile**. Both come from lands which lie to the north of Nazareth and these prophets ignored Israel and went to the gentiles. These gentiles were the

beneficiaries of God's favour over the many widows who were Jews, and the many lepers who were Jews. The gentiles were shown favour and the Jews shown none.

It does not take a lot of thought to see that this saying caused a great deal of anger to Jesus hearers. Here was Jesus saying that He was going to deliver the people, give sight to the blind, heal the broken hearted, and yet it seems not to apply to his hearers, the Jews of Nazareth but to the Gentiles. Jesus, the Jew is coming to these Jews of Nazareth, with a message of deliverance and the turns to them and says, "because you reject me in your hearts, you are not going to get any benefits from God". It is tantamount to saying to them "you are not saved, you are unbelievers".

The results of this confrontation were predictable, *Luk 4:28 And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, Luk 4:29 And rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong. Luk 4:30 But he passing through the midst of them went his way*.

This is quite likely to be another of Mary's accounts, and she was sitting with the women in the Synagogue, and she was wondering, "what is Jesus trying to do?" He is alienating the people. What sort of ministry is this that He preaches, "the acceptable year of the Lord" but at the same time antagonises the people? It said earlier that, *Luk 4:15 And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all.* We would be wrong to assume that every Synagogue had the same attitude, and that God was going to forsake them all. But it was here in His home town that He was rejected, because, *Joh 4:44 For he himself had said, "Prophets are not respected in their own country."* GNB.

Jesus did not do long sermons, but He said enough to get a response from the people. They did not get up and leave with no effect upon the soul, because He preached pure and applied Scripture, and it was the application that got to them.

Why do we preach? I can only say why I preach. It is not because I like hearing my own voice, in fact I do not like listening to my voice. But I must preach and this is why I keep churning out ministries. It is not hard for me to do it by God's grace and I feel no stress or lack of subjects when I do so. I have over the years come to see Jesus as the subject of Scripture, and it is Him whom I preach, *1Co 1:23 But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness*. I preach because I can and must preach, and because so many have muddied the pure waters of the Word, they need countering.

Does that mean that I am infallibly right? By no means. I am still getting rid of those things which make men corrupt the Word. Like the things in me, my natural man, who opposes Christ, and that he may be crucified and stay dead. I am coming through the vainglory of youth, the pride of middle age, the

combatitive attitude, the vanity of striving to be someone, the desire for pre-eminence, it is all summed up in the strife of vanity, *Php 2:3 Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Php 2:4 Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Php 2:5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus*:

One might say if you are not perfect, what is the point in going on? I hear my enemy's voice, the devil saying that, but I will go on, warts and all, and I will strive to be a better person. The Truth in Christ is suffering too much to give in to the devil. Perhaps the devil does gain some ground but I have the constant joy that it provokes me into learning more, and I am not disappointed.

And what if Jesus preached to some and His word fell upon deaf ears, does it make the Gospel of no effect. It does not, for as far as we are concerned, that is just one outcome and God decides what will be of all of the outcomes, *Isa 55:9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. Isa 55:10 For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: Isa 55:11 So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: **it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please**, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.*

The story of the sower says it all, *Luk 8:5 A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. Luk 8:6 And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. Luk 8:7 And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. Luk 8:8 And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold. And when he had said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear*.

It is the outcome of preaching, there are those who accept the Gospel and those who reject the Gospel. It is a fact that some will reject the truth, some will grow and wither through the thorns of life, some will not grow in the barren soil of their lives and die but some will thrive. In all of this, we do our duty and preach the same message to all classes of men.

And when we are opposed, like Jesus was, we see that there is no point banging our heads against a wall, and we walk through the opposition and go somewhere else. There is no need for a fight to occur, to force conversions, to have a pogrom, to capture and enslave those who reject the Gospel, as many religious organisations have done. The people have heard and they have rejected the Christ. There the matter ends and we shake the dust from our shoes and go to where we may be heard.

But the men of that Synagogue had not finished with Him yet, *Luk 4:28 And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, Luk 4:29 And rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong. Luk 4:30 But he passing through the midst of them went his way*,

They would have Him dead, but His time, the Fathers time had not arrived. They could not kill Him and He walks through them and on His way. He controls life and He controls death, *Joh 10:18 No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.*

25. The spirit of evil. *Luke 4:31 - 35*

If the ministry of Jesus at Nazareth showed anything, it showed the Lord did not coerce men into accepting Jesus. The message could be accepted or rejected and it was up to the nature of the man whether he met the terms of God's offer.

It also brings out that familiarity with a person diminishes them. Familiarity breeds contempt, so the saying goes, and it was true with familiarity with Jesus. Why should familiarity breed contempt? We have an idea that a great message should always be accompanied through a great messenger, one who has outward power and is not in anyway ordinary. Jesus appeared ordinary but the message was outrageous, it was a message of universal freedom, liberty, and it did not come at the price of an earthly revolution. Although a man may seem more ordinary by common knowledge of him, why should it diminish their message?

The ordinariness of Jesus was typical of His Kingdom. I have called it in the past a "topsy turvey" Kingdom. The greatest shall be the least, the poor shall be rich, and in this Kingdom, rank and position count for nothing, *Mat 23:11 But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. Mat 23:12 And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.* We must see that Jesus will not be sought by ambitious men, *Mat 11:29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. Mat 11:30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light*.

Jesus came to Capernaum to teach but the devil came as well, to disrupt, *Luk 4:31 And came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and taught them on the sabbath days. Luk 4:32 And they were astonished at his doctrine: for his word was with power. Luk 4:33 And in the synagogue there was a man, which had a spirit of an unclean devil, and cried out with a loud voice, Luk 4:34 Saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to*

destroy us? I know thee who thou art; the Holy One of God. Luk 4:35 And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. And when the devil had thrown him in the midst, he came out of him, and hurt him not.

I think this account in Mark speaks of the same event, *Mar 1:23 And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, Mar 1:24 Saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God. Mar 1:25 And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. Mar 1:26 And when the unclean spirit had torn him, and cried with a loud voice, he came out of him*.

It is the first time in the Bible we are confronted with a person who has a devil or evil spirit which is cast out. Why is this so important to us? Let me explain. We are undergoing at the present time, a pandemic of the various mutations of Coronovirus and this virus has been undergoing changes and consequently re-infecting people. The vaccination has not been proved to have given everyone immunity and so some people have received two doses and a booster dose to help them but with weakened immune systems they still get the virus.

The devil is like that virus and gets hold of us, and we fight him all of our lives with varying degrees of success. Ultimately we succumb to death and to him who has the power of death, κράτος = kratos, the strength of death, *Heb 2:14 Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that* ***through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil****;* Some people do not believe in satan but that does not mean he does not affect them, and they are left without an explanation for why there is evil in the world.

So it is necessary, at the outset, that Jesus reveals the nature of His enemy, to reveal the devil, uncloak him and defeat him. Not simply make us immune to him, while we continue to exist in this life, but to destroy him forever and rescue the people of God and give them life in the Kingdom, in new bodies which shall not be ravaged with sin and disease, *Rev 21:4 And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be* ***no more death****, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. Rev 21:5 And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful*. Jesus defeats the devil, He has authority over him, He is stronger, *Luk 11:20 But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you*.

Who are the people that the devil controls? We use different terms to describe satan's control. We use terms like "possessed", *Luk 8:36 They also which saw it told them by what means he that was possessed (δαιμονίζομαι = daimonizomai) of the devils was healed.* Terms like "bound"*, Luk 13:16 And ought not this*

woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day? We vehemently deny that a Christian can be possessed by a devil, but while that may be true, we are arrogating that claim to ourselves as individuals, but it must be shown to be true. We just cannot face the consequences of not being in Christ, *1Jn 4:4 Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world*. We must show this.

But the devil is real and the Christian is subject to temptation, just as Jesus was, *Heb 4:15 For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like* ***as we are****, yet without sin*. You can say that a Christian is not possessed but that does not free him from the influence of satan. In fact we were all under the influence of satan at one time, *Eph 2:1 And to you did he give life, when you were dead through your wrongdoing and sins, Eph 2:2* ***In which you were living in the past, after the ways of this present world, doing the pleasure of the lord of the power of the air****, the spirit who is now working in those who go against the purpose of God; Eph 2:3 Among whom we all at one time were living in the pleasures of our flesh, giving way to the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and the punishment of God was waiting for us even as for the rest.* BBE.

So what has happened? We once were totally enthralled to satan, in service to him not Christ and as the natural state of man we were spiritually dead. When we came to Christ for forgiveness, we changed allegiance, we moved camp, but the devil still pursued us, *1Pe 5:8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: 1Pe 5:9 Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world*.

The devil may not be in the believer but he is not in any way banished from contacting the believer, and he tries at every turn to get at us. What then is the difference between “possession” and “oppression”? This article describes the issue (found in DifferenceBetween.net)

> Oppression and possession are two classifications of demon influence and harassment toward human beings.
>
> Demons are considered a form of evil spirits that can influence human beings in many ways. Although there are many non-believers about demons and their influences, many religions insist that these spirits can influence or cause disruptions to human lives and their faith.
>
> In demonic oppression, the demon does not directly attack the person but influences his behaviour and the person’s entire life. The person under demonic oppression might exhibit abnormal or changes in personality,

attitude, and manners. Even with demonic influence, the person retains control over his physical body and mind.

On the other side, demonic possession is the state where the demon gains full command of a person's body. The demon takes away the person's ability to use his physical body, will, consciousness, and freedom. The body adopts the personality, voice, and actions of the demon. By using the person's body, the demon communicates to other people by using a different voice and ways like shouting profanity and taunts.

Both demonic oppression and possession need a certain degree of latitude or "acceptance" into the human person's body. For many religions and religious people, disobedience, committing sins, having temptations, participating in an occult religion, and a lack of faith are major reasons why demon oppression and possession happen.

Demonic oppression and possession can be remedied by doing repentance as well as purification of the body and soul. The most effective way to stop demonic influence is to reclaim faith and solidify belief with a strong will. These elements will help to battle the demon and other temptations. Exorcism, the process of forced extraction of an evil spirit from the body, is usually reserved for demon-possessed people. However, there is little evidence and accuracy regarding exorcism. The exorcist is usually performed by a member of the clergy.

According to Christians, a believer and follower of Jesus Christ can be oppressed but cannot be possessed. This notion is founded on the belief that the Holy Spirit (one of the Holy Trinity) resides in a person's body as its temple. This makes a Christian incorruptible and an exception to total demonic control.

Do you believe all of that? Do you believe that, "Demonic oppression and possession can be remedied by doing repentance as well as purification of the body and soul", I do not see people lining up for repentance and purification so as to get rid of the evil spirits. It is Jesus and Him alone who gets rid of the evil spirits.

That is all very well but the effects, possession or oppression, can be quite similar in some physical manifestations, for example, the poor woman bound by satan for eighteen years, *Luk 13:16 And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?* I do not know for certain whether she was oppressed or possessed, whether she was a believer as a "daughter of Abraham, or not. God has not made it absolutely clear to me, but one thing I know is that satan had somehow gotten to her, and tied her in some way,

crippling her body, and bending her double so that she could not look up. For eighteen years she had endured that until Jesus came along, and Jesus did not cast the devil out of her but laid His hands on her and she was made straight.

You can hear the people arguing why she was like she was, yet they are unable to help her. There are so many speculators in the church, all sitting in their seats, physically well, without the same problem, pontificating, while the poor woman struggles on with her condition. It is a bit like the disciples and the blind man, talking about his blindness as if he is not there, as if he doesn't matter, he is just a theological question, *Joh 9:1 And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. Joh 9:2 And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Joh 9:3 Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him*. Hello, I am here, I have a name even though I am blind!

Its not just a theological problem, the "pure word" as we said, its a real problem, the "applied word" with physical consequences. I do not care what you reason, as the sick person, the blind person, I just want to get well, not to discuss the theory. There then began an inquest by the Pharisees into the healing of the blind man, asking him lots of pedantic questions that he could not answer, and he replied simply, *Joh 9:24 Then again called they the man that was blind, and said unto him, Give God the praise: we know that this man is a sinner. Joh 9:25 He answered and said, Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that,* ***whereas I was blind, now I see***. The difference between "doctrine" and life, is that doctrine can be abstract but life is concrete. The causes of illness, sickness and disease are many and it takes discernment to see the causes, be it God, satan or nature, but it is not our purpose here to go into causes.

I note that satan was never cast out in times past according to Scripture and that this event occurred on the Sabbath day and that it was in the Synagogue. Jesus healing ministry is often connected with the Synagogue and on the Sabbath.

I do not see much difference between the Synagogues and the Churches, because they had effectively the same purpose, a place for reading the word, a place of meeting, a place of exercising the ministries that people had. Why you may ask did they drop the name Synagogue and bring in the word Church in the Christian era, after the resurrection of Jesus? Can it possibly be that they are the same, *Mat 18:15 Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. Mat 18:16 But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. Mat 18:17 And if he shall neglect to hear them,* ***tell it***

unto the church*: but if he neglect to hear* ***the church****, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.* Jesus is speaking under the OT and He is talking to those who hear the word, which He calls the Church, but they would also be a Synagogue. Perhaps the Synagogue was the OT version of the Church of the NT.

Jesus Himself set no pattern for the Church and never criticised the Synagogue forms of worship. It was transitory any way and would all pass with the using, *Joh 4:23 But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. Joh 4:24 God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth*. For now there is that imperfect service and worship in the Church which was the Synagogue.

An intriguing question is what is the man with a demon doing in a gathering of God's people, in the Synagogue? In the places which men think are so secure, so righteous, there lurks evil. John says that the Antichrists come from the Church, *1Jn 2:18 Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. 1Jn 2:19* ***They went out from us****, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of u*s.

In the book of Revelation, he gives instances of evil in the Churches, in Ephesus, *Rev 2:2 I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars*: in Smyrna, *Rev 2:9 I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan*. In Pergamos, *Rev 2:13 I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth*. In Thyatira, *Rev 2:20 Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols*. In Sardis, *Rev 3:2 Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God*. In Laodicea, *Rev 3:16 So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth*.

Rather than pillars of virtue, Churches, it seems, have a lot of evil going on in them, and the failure to see it going on is disastrous. John warned us about it, but we fail to take it as true for the time we like in, 2022. We are fools to think

we can remove evil by neglecting it and sticking our heads in the sand like an ostrich.

26. Evil in the churches. *Luke 4:32 - 33*

It has been suggested that you will not find a perfect church. It has further been suggested that if you found one do not go to it because your entry will make it imperfect. That my friends is the voice of the Laodicean, a person who is neither hot nor cold, a person who is defeatist, a person not bothered about what is right. Whether or not we get a church which has a degree of perfection or not, it is incumbent upon me to be perfect, *Mat 5:48 Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect*.

The devil, as we saw last time, is in the churches. He may be hidden or he may be in plain sight but he is there and he works to make us fail of the grace of God. Only Jesus reveals satan, and He reveals him on the Sabbath and in a church meeting in Capernaum, *Luk 4:31 And came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and taught them on the sabbath days. Luk 4:32 And they were astonished at his doctrine: for his word was with power. Luk 4:33 And in the synagogue there was a man, which had a spirit of an unclean devil, and cried out with a loud voice*, On the very day of a sacred meeting, there he is in the company of believers, satan, the prince of the power of the air.

We accept angels into the church, but also there is satan in the Church, *Rev 2:1 Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks*; We should not be surprised that devils attend also, *Rev 2:8 And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; Rev 2:9 I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are* ***the synagogue of Satan****. Rev 2:10 Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold,* ***the devil shall cast some of you into prison****, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life*.

We seldom think that the devil is a reality and that is just what he wants us to think. I think we should pray before all our meetings that satan is kept away from us, and this prayer is a key to remember, *Luk 11:4 And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation;* ***but deliver us from evil***.

The evil at Capernaum is manifested in the taking over of a person's body. The person may be possessed completely or partially, by single or multiple demons. *Luk 9:39* ***A demon often attacks him and makes him screa****m. It shakes him*

until he foams at the mouth, and it won't leave him until it has completely worn the boy out……. Luk 8:27 And when he went forth to land, there met him out of the city a certain man, ***which had devils long time****, and ware no clothes, neither abode in any house, but in the tombs…….. Joh 13:27 And after the sop* ***Satan entered into him****. Then said Jesus unto him, That thou doest, do quickly*. The nature of possession is on some spectrum, from occasional to permanent possession.

It would also appear that the devils need a host to enter this earthly realm and speak. From the devil using a serpent in the garden of Eden, to using Peter's voice to rebuke Jesus, the devil finds a way of getting into man or beast to cause damage. The devil uses other means, by the permission of God to show his power, *Job 1:16 While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The fire of God is fallen from heaven, and hath burned up the sheep, and the servants, and consumed them; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. Job 1:17 While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The Chaldeans made out three bands, and fell upon the camels, and have carried them away, yea, and slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. Job 1:18 While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, Thy sons and thy daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house: Job 1:19 And, behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee*.

Of course, some men see this as natural disasters, but we would be advised to speak with caution on matters where we do not know the cause, because it could well be demonic. But it matters not what the cause of the events, it is "the tower or Siloam" syndrome, for it is still a lesson to man to count his days and repent, *Luk 13:2 And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things? Luk 13:3 I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Luk 13:4 Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? Luk 13:5 I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish*.

Look at the what the devil says to Jesus, *Luk 4:33 And in the synagogue there was a man, which had a spirit of an unclean devil, and cried out with a loud voice, Luk 4:34 Saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art; the Holy One of God*. **"Let us alone"**.

The CEV put s it more colloquially, *Luk 4:34 "Hey, Jesus of Nazareth, what do you want with us? Are you here to get rid of us? I know who you are! You are God's Holy One."* CEV. Demons know of Jesus, not just from their recent defeat at

the Temptation of Christ, but from much farther back. From before the time Christ walked with Israel in the Wilderness, from before the time that Abraham rejoiced to see Him, from before He waked in the Garden of Eden, from even before He made the world.

The demons appear to be angelic beings who disobeyed God*, Jud 1:6 Remember the angels who did not stay within the limits of their proper authority, but abandoned their own dwelling place: they are bound with eternal chains in the darkness below, where God is keeping them for that great Day on which they will be condemned*. GNB. They are bound with chains so how do they influence men? I think the idea of a chain is to restrict, and to that end all evil is restricted, *Rev 20:1 And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. Rev 20:2 And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years*,

I think that it is going to get a lot worse, ***2Th 2:7*** *For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only* ***he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way****. 2Th 2:8 And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming*: The devil's know that they have a limited time.

The demons do not address Him as God but "Jesus of Nazareth" *Luk 4:34 Saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou* ***Jesus of Nazareth****? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art; the Holy One of God.* They have seen Him in His incarnation, Jesus of Nazareth, and they see Him now as the destroyer of their world. On another occasion, a Gadara, He cast the devils out of the men possessed, and the devil's said to Him, *Mat 8:29 And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God?* ***art thou come hither to torment us before the time****?* They knew Jesus was coming for them but they did not know when.

That gives us much comfort, because it shows the absolute certainty of Jesus' victory over satan and his demons, and they know it. Because they know it so should we. What stops us from seeing this truth? I think that we selfishly look at the cross as a victory for us, so that we might be forgiven, but we do not look at God's bigger plan of redemption, the Universal effect of Christ, in destroying all evil, *Rev 21:4 And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.*

These demons saw something else that we fail to see, "*I know thee who thou art;* ***the Holy One*** *of God."* The relationship that we strive to cultivate is one where Jesus becomes "one of the boys", a familiar, someone who is amenable to all we do, and we bring Him down to our level, instead of exalting Him, seeing Him as

the Holy One of God. If demonic eyes could see this, then what eyes fail to see it? He may be a friend to us but He is not an equal, and we too shall fall before Him in reverence, *Php 2:9 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: Php 2:10* ***That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow****, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; Php 2:11 And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

If we did not pass over these verses so quickly, we would see these great truths, even truths coming from the lips of devil's. But the veil is drawn across the conversation, *Luk 4:35 And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. And when the devil had thrown him in the midst, he came out of him, and hurt him not*.

Jesus did not need the devils to add credibility to His story, He did not need the testimony of demons to accompany His progress, and He told them to shut up. But think for a minute how much worse than devils, are the obstinate people of this world, who when confronted with Jesus just ignore Him. What do you suppose will happen to them when their knees fail and they bend before the King of Kings and Lord of Lords?

The people did not expect that event to disrupt their Sabbath service, *Luk 4:36 And they were all amazed, and spake among themselves, saying, What a word is this! for with authority and power he commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out. Luk 4:37 And the fame of him went out into every place of the country round about*.

That people were devil possessed was not unknown, what was unknown was the authority of the man Jesus. The discernment, the power, were all in Jesus and now the devil could be see in the Congregation of the Lord.

This healing, this miracle, took place on the Sabbath, not deliberately to provoke the Jews, who steadfastly kept the Sabbath, but to teach them a lesson. Perhaps the Jews were aware of God watching them, because it was Sabbath breaking that was the cause of the captivity, the Jews were zealous to observe it, lest they suffered the same fate as there ancestors. The healing took place on this day because it was a day devoted to God and everyone who delighted to keep it should be able to, unencumbered by disease or anything that stopped the enjoyment and refreshment of it. This poor soul, this son of Adam was tied by the devil, and he had not one wit of joy this day. That which God gave to bless man was by satan made an encumbrance.

Exo 31:13 Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the LORD that doth sanctify you. Exo

31:14 Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Exo 31:15 Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD: whosoever doeth any work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. Exo 31:16 Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. Exo 31:17 It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever: for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed.

The Jew had so guarded the Sabbath day that he had forgotten the duty to his neighbour, *Luk 13:14 And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the sabbath day, and said unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the sabbath day. Luk 13:15 The Lord then answered him, and said, Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering? Luk 13:16 And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?*

The Jew had forgotten the delight of entering into the joy of his Lord, *Isa 58:13 If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and* ***call the sabbath a delight****, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: Isa 58:14 Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.*

This day of all days was a chance to enter into God's rest, to cease from labours, to contemplate the works of God, to think about eternity with Him. I see now why many people called it the Lord's day, and some transferred (without any warrant from God) the day, to the Christian Sunday, in the hope that people would spend time with the Lord and by observing the day would be better for it. But by setting up a law, by caging a man in that law, by depriving him of the freedom to observe it from the heart, they had merely developed one more rule for Pharisaism and some Christians are mighty Pharisees. Paul says, *Rom 14:5 One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. Rom 14:6 He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day,* ***to the Lord he doth not regard it****.*

You can regard a day in the freedom the Lord brings, and you can regard it not in the freedom the Lord brings, and it is up to you what you do as long as you act in the Lord. Or, you can compel a man to do something and he loses the delight of serving the Lord in freedom. The man possessed with devils was like the man

whose freedom had been taken away, who turned up on the Sabbath day to the Synagogue because he was expected to. I hope that you will note that there were no Synagogues originally and the Sabbath was celebrated at home.

Where do those people come from that would make the Sabbath day a rule of Christianity? Are they of the Lord or are they of satan? It does not matter how well they are esteemed, how well educated they are, what denomination they belong to, if they cannot show from the Bible, on what principle they act, then they are spouting out of themselves and the devil must be well pleased. *Col 2:16 Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon,* ***or of the sabbath days****: Col 2:17 Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ*.

Jesus frees this poor soul from the darkness to serve God in truth, he has enabled this man to be free, *Heb 9:14 How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works* ***to serve the living God***?

This is a practical example of Sabbath keeping, *Luk 13:15 The Lord then answered him, and said, Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering*? It is a miracle of freedom, loosing from satan, freeing from the things which hindered the man from serving his God.

You will say to me, thank you for explaining that, now I don't have to keep the Sabbath, I feel liberated from the law. But you are not liberated to serve yourself, to go doing all those time fillers that you invent, until your life runs out. You serve God at all times and in every place, and we all do well to remember this. The earthly Sabbath pointed to an eternal Sabbath, a rest in God which we still strive towards. Let's not swap one form of bondage for another which is equally not in the Lord.

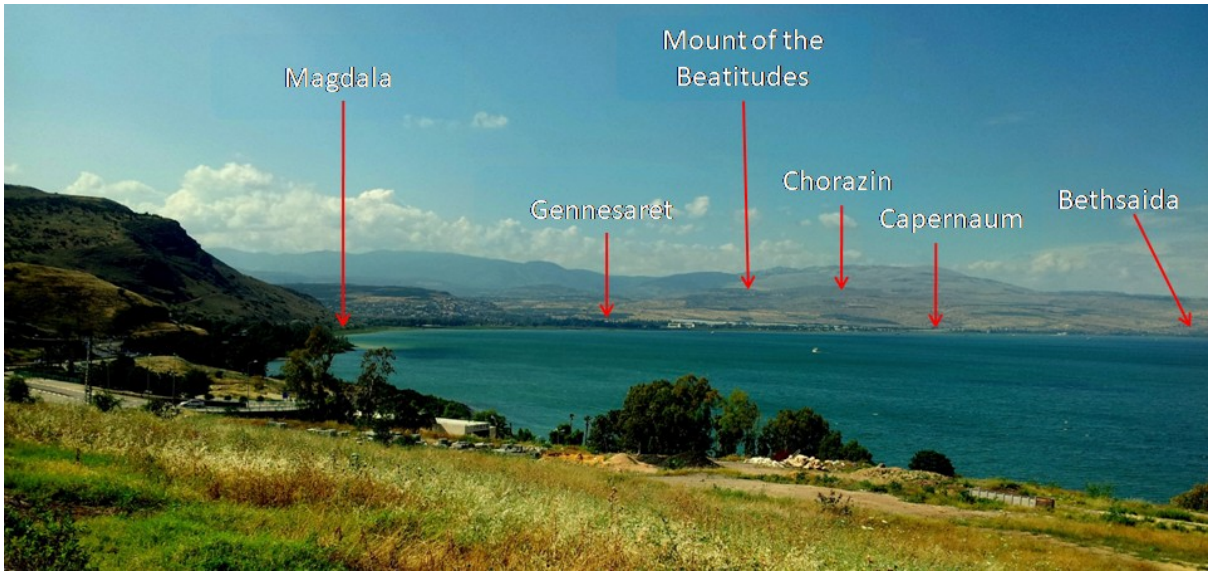
And that leads me to consider it is a form slavery, and all men are slaves to this, slavery to sin, but I leave that to another study.

27. Peter's mother in law. *Luke 4:38 - 39*

Luk 4:38 And he arose out of the synagogue, and entered into Simon's house. And Simon's wife's mother was taken with a great fever; and they besought him for her. Luk 4:39 And he stood over her, and rebuked the fever; and it left her: and immediately she arose and ministered unto them.

One of the things which surprised me when we went to Galilee was the close proximity of every town that is mentioned in the narrative of Luke. The picture,

taken from Tiberius, shows the position of the ancient cities, that you could walk to in a day and Jesus concentrated much of His ministry in this small area. Of course they are all close to the lake, because that was a means of supplying fish, a major industry and it was a means of transportation across the lake, enabling trade.



You may have though it was a blessed place, the world at peace with God, golden corn fields, Jesus walking among the people, healing them, preaching, as the hymn writer Whittier wrote:

> O Sabbath rest by Galilee,
> O calm of hills above,
> where Jesus knelt to share with thee
> the silence of eternity,
> interpreted by love!

But you do not find the words of Jesus at all peaceful. *Luk 10:13 Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, which have been done in you, they had a great while ago repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. Luk 10:14 But it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment, than for you. Luk 10:15 And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be thrust down to hell. Luk 10:16* ***He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent m****e*.

The context of this was when Jesus sent His 72 disciples to preach the Gospel, which we gather from His comment was not a great success. Jesus tells them that they should be heard with the same authority as if it were Him speaking. But

they did not hear Him or the disciples. The people of Galilee suffered from the same problem that the people of Nazareth suffered from. **Familiarity**.

Capernaum comes in for some heavy judgement, *Mat 11:23 And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. Mat 11:24 But I say unto you, That it shall be* ***more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment,*** *than for thee…….. Luk 10:15 And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven,* ***shalt be thrust down to hell****.*

How could a place, a place that Jesus went to and preached to, become such a failure in terms of conversions? Surely you would say, if Jesus could not speak to the people, how on earth can we? But there is one inhibitor to faith which we should mention here, and in the sovereignty of God it "stops" God working. It is a limitation that God imposes on Himself, such that it stands for all time. It is the limitation of personal unbelief of men in Jesus. *Mat 13:58* ***And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief.*** The people of Galilee, as a body did not believe Jesus for who He was. They could take the miracles, the healings, the miraculous meals He provided, but they did not trust to Him. *Joh 6:26 Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled*.

A word is used for His growing reputation, and it is "fame". *Luk 4:14 And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a* ***fame*** (***Φήμη = phēmē)*** *of him through all the region round about. Luk 4:15 And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all*. Fame has today become a word used to denote that when you are famous, "wherever you go, your good reputation will precede you. People will think well of you, because your merits have been impressively explained in advance". That "good reputation" is implied, but in the past it was not and the word simply means the "report" of Him, the sound of Him, went out and about. The word fame comes from Φήμη = phēmē, a sound.

His "fame" said nothing about Him, about the person, about His very being and substance. The people were of course in awe of Him, they wondered about Him, they were amazed at Him, at His power and authority, but few believed in Him and saw through that veil of His flesh to that Deity. He was certainly a phenomenon, no one could disagree, but they had not perceived Him as their Saviour. To many He was just an extraordinary man with extraordinary powers, doing works and miracles in the same power as the OT prophets. He may have been one for all they knew, *Mar 8:27 And Jesus went out, and his disciples, into the towns of Caesarea Philippi: and by the way he asked his disciples, saying unto them, Whom do men say that I am? Mar 8:28 And they answered, John the*

Baptist: but some say, Elias; and others, One of the prophets. Mar 8:29 And he saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Peter answereth and saith unto him, Thou art the Christ.

This is how Jesus was perceived in His early ministry, a wonder worker, and it would need many more lessons to teach men who He was and why He came, but He has started. After removing the demon, Jesus goes to Peter's house. Luke has made no mention of the disciples and no mention of how Peter was called and this must have happened before these events. Alternatively, Jesus could have befriended Peter before this time, and He knew him well enough to be invited to his home. There Jesus finds Peter's mother in law in the state of high fever.

This incidentally tells us that Peter was a married man and those who follow popes, must concede the first pope, Peter, was far from celibate, and it remains a great mystery why Rome changed the text and brought Peter to Rome and had him installed as the first pontiff. And that is the difference between us and the inventors of religion, because we choose to follow God's word handed down to us.

Jesus heals Peter's mother in law, and all is seemingly well, but look at what He does. He talks to the fever. He addresses it as if it were a rational being, a sentient being, something that can hear Him and respond to Him. He could have, for the sake of the listeners said , "I heal you, in the Name of the Lord", but He does not. *Luk 4:39 And he stood over her, and rebuked the fever; and it left her: and immediately she arose and ministered unto them*. He rebukes it, He admonishes it, so matter of fact, as if He had spent all His life talking to fevers.

When we get sick of a fever, we don't rebuke it, we pop a couple of paracetemols and sit it out. Gradually, in a few hours the fever goes down and its all over in a day or two. But Jesus talks to the fever, rebukes the fever and like a bad dog it goes away instantly, at the Masters voice. The voice that made the worlds could just speak things **out** of existence.

Christ speaks the language of the cell, the language of DNA, the language that He wrote at Creation, and penned into the essence of man, distinguishing him from the other creatures. Language does not come about by random changes from nothing but out of the logical mind of God. It has the 5 components of language, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. The people at that time would have been amazed that they were made of a string of components, the DNA that conformed to the rules of language and as a language, could be spoken. Is it so fanciful that Jesus spoke the code of the cell and put her DNA in order? This is healing. Is it far fetched?

> A group of researchers under the flag of the MRG-GRammar (Massive Reverse Genomics to Decipher Gene Regulatory Gramma project), a

> European funded project under Future and Emerging Technologies in Horizon 2020, are committed to understanding the language of DNA, combining synthetic biology with innovative DNA-printing technologies and bioinformatics. Understanding this language will be useful to implement a healthcare system tailored to the needs of each person, for the detection of different types of cancer, like melanoma for example, and more generally for finding the origin of many diseases. (from FET website).

Jesus knew that language and it is intelligence that leads to order, and blind chance that leads to chaos. Christ spoke to the “fever”, it heard Him, responded to Him, and the fever left, and the body resumed normality, all the components that contributed to the fever were normalised, although what Jesus said in addition to perform this miracle is not recorded. *Luk 5:23 Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk*? We only hear what He wants us to hear.

We should consider what this means. We have the concept of a world view, the Christian world view and its counterpart, the unbelieving world view. It is a view of the universe expressed in ethics, religion, philosophy, scientific beliefs and so on. The Christian world view takes into account the creationist view, the view that a personal God is responsible for our existence, the view that this world is fallen due to sin, the view the Christ the Creator entered this world to die for sin and redeem the creation. The unbelieving world view is diametrically opposed. It is a random world, an evolutionary world, a world with man and not God at the helm, sailing nowhere on the meaningless sea of time.

And here I see another world view, that of Christ Himself. It differs from the Christian world view in that it must take into account the world of the spiritual. The world where disease is spoken away, the world of spirits, the world obeying everything that He speaks, the world where nothing can become something, the world where dead can become alive, the world of eternity, the world where He could hear the thoughts of men, the world where physics as we know it, ceased and He could walk upon the waters, the world of endless possibilities.

He is introducing these possibilities to the world in Galilee. The man possessed and Peter’s mother in law had experienced them, and now some others in that place would get a taste of the powers He possessed, *Luk 4:40 Now when the sun was setting, all they that had any sick with divers diseases brought them unto him; and he laid his hands on every one of them, and healed them. Luk 4:41 And devils also came out of many, crying out, and saying, Thou art Christ the Son of God. And he rebuking them suffered them not to speak: for they knew that he was Christ*. These devils know Him, that He is the anointed one and mankind was being given a glimpse of it.

The churches argue about whether these powers of healing still exist today or not, like monkeys squabbling over some bananas. One group says that the miraculous has ceased because Christ has departed the world, others say He has left the repository of gifts with the church. They are like the children Jesus spoke of, playing in the markets, calling to one another, squabbling, disagreeing with one another and failing to come to an understanding of what is going on. It makes no difference whether you "believe", whether you think they can happen today or not, your "thinking" does not make them happen. It is God's will and purpose that makes things happen, and we have got a bit above ourselves to dare to think we are equal with Him and that we can sit with Him and argue as equals, the "where's and why fore's" of His Sovereign purpose.

The people that Jesus healed would eventually die and that is the truth. The man possessed would find some other disagreeable ailment withering him, Peter's nameless mother in law would get sick again and die, the people healed of various diseases would succumb to other diseases and die. Do you not see the point, that they were **not** healed of every disease and affliction, such that they never became ill again and therefore lived for ever, not aging not decaying? Jesus heals them for sure, but He doesn't heal them forever, in this life.

Jesus shows by these miracles that He has the power to cure everything, and that He will cure everything, but that is only part of His work for He has much else to do. That is one reason that He stops the devil's from telling everyone who He is, *Luk 4:41 And devils also came out of many, crying out, and saying, Thou art Christ the Son of God. And he rebuking them suffered them not to speak: for they knew that he was Christ*.

If the key task that Jesus came to do was to heal people, He would not have told the devils or the lepers to be quiet about it. He would have put it out their, and He would have had great queues of people lining up for healing all day, it would have occupied Him fully and He would have become a one man National Health Service. He would not have been selective in His healing, and as time progressed even the small facial blemishes, warts, the bent teeth, the amount of hair and the type of figure that you wanted would all have been healed. The trivial wants would have been cured. But they were not and all these things are left for men to sort out.

What was the principle task that Jesus had? *Luk 4:42 And when it was day, he departed and went into a desert place: and the people sought him, and came unto him, and stayed him, that he should not depart from them. Luk 4:43 And he said unto them,* ***I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also****: for therefore am I sent. Luk 4:44 And he preached in the synagogues of Galilee*.

It was the preaching of the Kingdom of God and He must not be side tracked into giving any more signs and miracles than necessary to achieve that end. There are two things that Jesus did in fulfilment of His ministry,

1. He did signs and wonders and
2. He spoke about the Kingdom in Parables.

The parables of the Kingdom are not for the children of earth but the children of Heaven,*Mat 13:11 He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given…….. Mat 13:13 Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. Mat 13:14 And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perce*ive:

But more of this later.

28. Fishing for men. *Luke 5:1 - 3*

Luk 5:1 And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret, Luk 5:2 And saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets. Luk 5:3 And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship.

It was another working day in Capernaum and the fisherman had come in from a night's fishing, a fishless night, a waste of time, all that effort for nothing. They said as much to Jesus, *Luk 5:5 And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.* They were washing their nets because they were giving up but life is full of disappointments and tomorrow is another day. There must have been times when they had success and times when they did not, and this was an unsuccessful expedition.

They are repairing the tools of their trade, cleaning nets and mending the nets when Jesus sees them. I found this extract informative on the lives of fisherman and it is taken from "That the World May Know" website:

Before Jesus' time, few Israelites were fishermen. There was only one Hebrew word for fish, and it covered everything from minnows to whales. In Jesus' time, a small, flourishing fishing industry developed around the Sea of Galilee. The town of Magdala (in Greek, Tarichaeae, "the place where fish are salted") was a sardine-pickling centre. Many of the images Jesus used indicated that he was familiar with fishing and the sea.

The job of a fisherman in Jesus' day was difficult. Fishermen worked year-round in the heat of summer and the cold of winter, often at night. Certainly, Jesus' choice of Capernaum, on the Sea of Galilee, as his home brought him into contact with many fishermen. Several of his disciples - Andrew, Peter, James, and John - knew the trade well. It's possible that Jesus selected fishermen as his disciples not only because the imagery of their occupation fit well with the mission that he had called them to, but also because they were a hardy group of people, accustomed to difficult work and long hours. Jesus even asked them to return to the lake and fish again after a night of fishing without a catch (Luke 5:1-7).

One of the most important skills of fishermen was making and mending nets. Made of linen, a common fabric used in the ancient Near East, these nets had to be carefully cleaned and dried each day or they would quickly rot and wear out. The majority of a fisherman's life probably was spent mending nets (Luke 5:2). Net weights, small pieces of stone with holes drilled in them, were fastened to the bottom of the nets. This too took time. Fishermen also had to be skilled, of course, in the use of the nets in fishing for various types of fish.

The Old Testament refers to catching fish with hooks, spears, and several types of nets (Job 18:8; Ecc. 9:12; Isa. 19:8). Several types of nets were used in Jesus' time. The seine net was probably the oldest. Several hundred feet long and as much as 20 feet high, this net was dropped by fishermen from boats several hundred yards from shore, and parallel to it. Cork or wood floats kept one edge of the net on the water's surface, while stone sinkers fastened to the other edge pulled it to the bottom. As the fishermen pulled the net ashore, the net trapped any fish in its path. When the fishermen had dragged the net ashore, they sorted the catch, throwing out animals without fins and scales. They cleaned and sold the fish, remembering to give Rome's share to the tax collector. Jesus used the seine net as an illustration in his description of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 13:47-48). James and John were probably mending (preparing) seine nets when Jesus called them (Matt. 4:21).

The circular cast net measured up to 25 feet in diameter and was thrown into the water from the shore or a boat. Simon and Andrew were using this type of net when Jesus called them (Mark 1:16-18).

The trammel net was composed of three walls, reinforcing each other with increasingly smaller mesh. Fish passed through the layers until they found themselves caught against the inner wall and eventually became entangled. The net was retrieved and the fish extracted. This net was washed in the morning, as it traditionally was used at night. Sometimes fishermen encircled a shoal of fish with a trammel net and threw a cast net into the centre. Fishermen may have jumped into the water to retrieve the cast net and catch the fish trapped in the circle of the larger net. Often more than one boat was used with the trammel net (Luke 5:1-7). The New Testament reference to Peter putting on his clothes before meeting Jesus probably indicated that he had been fishing in this way (John 21:7).

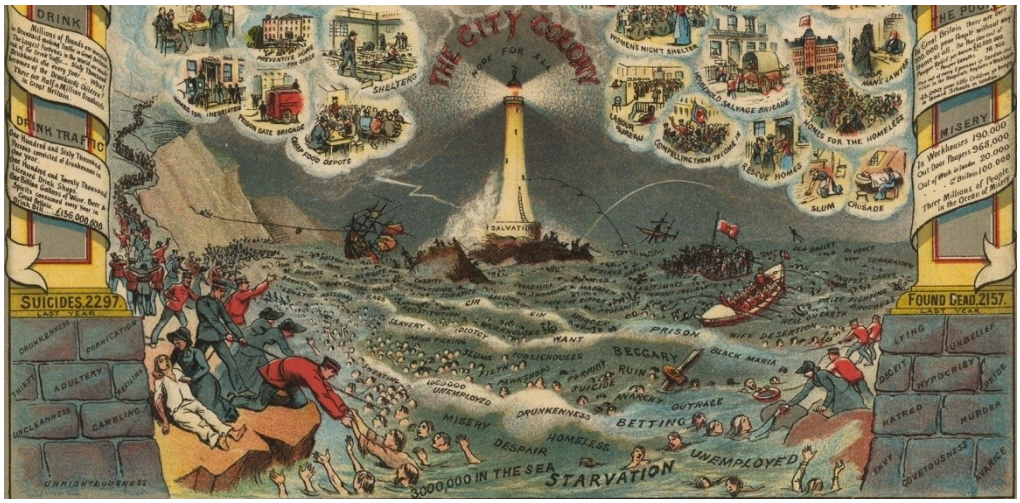
Various species of freshwater fish in the Sea of Galilee were caught with the different types of nets. Renowned Galilee scholar Mendel Nun has described the three types of fish. Musht, called St. Peter's fish, was, according to tradition, the type of fish caught by Peter. This fish is found on the northern end of the sea, near the area of Jesus' ministry and Peter's fishing. It grows up to 15 inches long and three pounds in weight. It has relatively few bones and is very tasty. (Take my word for it!) It is likely that this is the kind of fish Jesus used to feed 5,000 people (Matt. 14:13-21). Biny, a member of the carp family, was used in Bible lands for feasts and banquets. Sardines are small fish that were caught in enormous numbers. Drying and pickling sardines was the main industry of Magdala, home of Mary Magdalene. These are probably the "small fish" referred to in the Bible (Matt. 15:34; Mark 8:7).

The fishing industry in the area where Jesus ministered, and the fishermen among his disciples, provided effective images for the lessons Jesus taught his audiences. The disciples' task was to become "fishermen" for the kingdom. The long hours, the carefully practiced skills, and the various techniques and nets used in catching specific kinds of fish all must have passed through their minds. Seeking people to follow Jesus would take the same care, dedication, and skill used in fishing (Matt. 4:18-19). The disciples learned that they must seek all kinds of people to follow Jesus, though some would eventually turn away.

We might think for a moment, if we are called to so do so, “what are the nets we use to trap the fish”? Do we use our nets to catch men, or to catch them out? Are

we really concerned for the catch or simply to show our prowess as fishermen? I must confess to this appalling attitude when I embarked on Christianity, that I was more concerned to win the argument, get one over on the poor unbeliever, than for my concern to see the person bought to a saving knowledge of Christ. But this fishing, this mission of Jesus, is in a sense a rescue mission, and I did not see it as that. It is more of a lifeboat that we launch than a fishing boat, and certainly not a gun boat to shoot them in the water.

The prophet Isaiah sees these lost people as the troubled sea, wallowing in their filth and excrement, *Isa 57:19 I create the fruit of the lips; Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near, saith the LORD; and I will heal him. Isa 57:20 But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.*



I was reminded of a picture that accompanied the book, In “Darkest England and the Way Out”, by William Booth. Do read it. It showed in the lower portion of the picture a lighthouse with “Salvation” written around it, and the Salvationists, the army set up by Booth, rescuing men from the troubled sea of the world, saving them from all manner of ills. I think Jesus had this in mind when he used the metaphor of “fishers of men”.

Not all are fishers of men. The words are said to Simon Peter, *Luk 5:10 And so was also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men*. The work of and Evangelist is very particular and has a particular God given ability. *Eph 4:11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers*;.....*1Co 12:28* ***And God hath set*** *some in the church,* ***first apostles****, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. 1Co 12:29 Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? 1Co 12:30 Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret*?

I say again, not everybody is called to this task. Some are and they know they are because they have the calling of Jesus and He makes “fishers of men”. This does not mean that we keep the good new quiet, if we are not called to this task, we all have a duty to speak when asked, *1Pe 3:15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fea*r: But it is a calling to be an evangelist.

Most Christian churches say all men should all be “fishers” and so they take this task upon themselves and impress others to do the same, having overheard the conversations with Peter and Andrew in the Bible, they think that it would be a good idea to do this as well. They take it upon themselves but by what authority are you to blindly follow this task without a calling? It is typical of the way we arrogate the words of Scripture to ourselves even if they do not apply to us. It is like the man trying to find guidance from Scripture using the “flip plop” method. He flipped opened his Bible and plopped his finger on a verse for guidance. It said “Judas went and hanged himself”. Undeterred he went on and with the second “plop”, he landed on the verse which said, “go thou and do likewise”. Choosing random verses and verses out of context does not indicate the leading of the Spirit.

And this is why Christianity is seen as failing to live up to its promise. It is particularly true in the area of healing, where wishful thinking has replaced the genuine article and people say the words without the power of the Lord to back it up, and sick people are disappointed because they were not healed and Christianity becomes a fraud worked in God’s name.

An extreme of this “fishing” became known as Flirty Fishing (FFing) and was a form of religious prostitution practiced by the Children of God/The Family cult led by David Berg or aka Moses David, from 1974 until it was officially discontinued in 1987 (due, in part, to the AIDS scare). Its etymology can be traced to *Matthew 4:19 where Jesus says "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.*"

“Flirty Fishing was a subset of The Family's love bombing activities and involved the use of sexual attraction and intercourse to win converts and favours. Female members were told to be "God's whores" and "hookers for Jesus", and soon after its launch as a method of witnessing, sex was given to complete strangers in combination with a request for a "donation", or for a required fee in line with Escort Servicing (ESing) or freelance ESing. FFing and prostitution was widely used as a way to raise money for the cult and resulted in many of the second generation births (known as "Jesus Babies"). Internal Family records from 1988 indicate that over 223,000 "fish" were loved sexually between 1978 and 1988.” When you take something out of context there is no end to where it can go!

There is **no bait** in net fishing., nothing to entice the fish, you just cast the net and see what is there. It's a bit like planting seed, *1Co 3:6 I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. 1Co 3:7 So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase*. The bounty of the harvest, be it fish or corn, is the Lord's.

Peters first fishing trip on his own, at Pentecost is a dogmatic approach to the faith, *Act 2:36 Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. Act 2:37 Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Act 2:38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost*.

There is no enticement, just the statement of fact, "*that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ".* Having got their attention, they question him, "*they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?"* Then he pulls the net around the catch, *"Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost".*

And there it is again, the thing which we neglect to ask, the thing that John and Jesus insisted on. REPENTANCE.

29. Sorting and packing the "fish". *Luke 5:3*

We last saw the fishermen washing their nets, and when Jesus asked them to borrow their boat as a pulpit, they let Him do so without a murmur, *Luk 5:3 And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship*.

The Fishermen become "fishers of men", but as we saw with the Galileans, who had been fishing all night without catching a thing, it is sometimes disappointing. Being a fisherman doesn't mean that you will always catch something, some get away. As "fishers of men" you will catch people who will become believers, and others who will not, *Mat 13:47 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: Mat 13:48 Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. Mat 13:49 So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, Mat 13:50*

And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

I was led to consider that it is one thing “catching men” and it is another thing doing something with them after they are caught. What do they become when they were caught? Do they get put in a glass cage, an aquarium, to be gawped at, to become mere trophies of the fisherman? Or were they rescued, transformed and made fit for service to God? I think that it was the later and this task became the role of building them up, the role for a pastor/teacher and prophet, *Eph 4:11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; Eph 4:12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:*

They became a body of believers with some also who did not believe but gave assent to the word and they met together in their houses and Synagogues and continued on with life just like before except they now had a different World view.

I also considered how they managed themselves and how different we are today. We have got established churches, established ministries, and buildings from by-gone generations, established congregations, an infrastructure unheard of in the days of the fishermen. We have long established churches going back beyond our memory and the traditions of them to a time that is lost along with the memory of their founders. We cannot reason why we do things in a certain way but we do them anyway, blindly and obediently just the same.

The poor fishermen would hardly get a look in today’s church, they would be too unlearned and too common to have any responsibility in “Today’s churches”, but these were the very pioneers that Jesus chose, not from the religious caste, from the school of learning, *Act 4:13 The officials were amazed to see how brave Peter and John were, and they knew that these two apostles were only ordinary men and not well educated. The officials were certain that these men had been with Jesus.* They had spent their time wisely, with Jesus, not at Bible College.

The fisherman would be lost and amazed at all the things which now pass for such a simple Christianity. They would be ashamed of us, that what they had laboured against, had become acceptable practice, in their future, *1Co 6:9 Don't you know that evil people won't have a share in the blessings of God's kingdom? Don't fool yourselves! No one who is immoral or worships idols or is unfaithful in marriage or is a pervert or behaves like a homosexual 1Co 6:10 will share in God's kingdom. Neither will any thief or greedy person or drunkard or anyone who curses and cheats others*. CEV.

Would they say that we were Christians and would they have fellowship with us? I think not because we are so different. It was hardly worth their effort and

suffering, to have it all changed in the future, all we do is undermine it. But not so then, *Act 2:42 And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.* They had a way of doing Christianity, and it followed a scheme, the **Apostles doctrine**. We do not follow it or we only follow it in part.

And I further considered, how would the people who settle into ministries today be, if they had **to make** the ministry first of all, to go out and gather the believers? Today they just inherit a church, a building that is already there for them, a salary for doing the work, working to the call of men, to whose tune they must dance, a set pattern of worship that moves around them and not the Lord, and a one person ministry in most cases. Not that all are bad people, diligent people or sincere people, but do they question where they are coming from? It is all done for them and the ministry is just like any other job.

But what if they had to start from scratch? What pattern would they use? If they did not use the NT they could not call themselves Christians, so they must have a plan which follows the NT, *Rom 15:4 For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.*

What about the mix of believer and unbeliever you find in the churches today? We see that the net of the fisherman does not discern its catch, for fishes of all types are caught. There is the same net that covers both types, the believer and un-believer. But the one thing that will, to a large measure, safeguard the church from the unbeliever, is the Word of God, *Heb 4:12 For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart*. If there are too many unbelievers who get into the congregations, it is because there is a lack of Christianity in that place, and a lack of preaching to the heart.

There is too much intellect in the Churches and not enough heart felt thanks to Jesus. By this I mean too much logical assent to the truth, which can be made even by those who do not believe in the saving work of Christ. In this way the unbeliever gets in, and with no safeguarding Word, the rot has set in. But look at Corinth, they had a way of dealing with outsiders, *1Co 14:24 But suppose all of you are prophesying when those unbelievers and outsiders come in. They will realize that they are sinners, and they will want to change their ways because of what you are saying. 1Co 14:25 They will tell what is hidden in their hearts. Then they will kneel down and say to God, "We are certain that you are with these people."*

The compromised church that we have today, caters for the unbeliever. Some churches even plan their meetings around unbelievers, and have a “seeker

service” as part of their worship, like the Willow Creek mega church in Chicago. We speak about the issues of faith which try to influence the unbeliever who is the child of the devil, and we look to make an unequal yoke with them. We invite them in, as if they can pray and join in worship, the same way that a Christian does. We invite them to “occupational games”, pastimes, messy church, for what? If we do not preach the Gospel this is just entertainment. People are dying in their millions and all we do is entertain them, tell them things are alright and when they awake in death to the horrible reality that there is no way back and no escape, they will curse us.

This leads me to another consideration, the structure of churches. They go on, to perpetuate for generations, until people have lost the memory of where they came from, and eventually to a forgetting where they are going. Instead of just building upon this dead past, each generation must build its own body up and when it dies another can spring up, not the dead flower of a past congregation, shrivelled up and withered, but another and for a time, vibrant body, meeting its generation head on, not living in some past of another persons making.

Congregations should know when to grow, when to split organically, for the sake of the advance of the Gospel. What happens in practice, because we are lazy, we tend to settle down, get into a rut, accumulate people, grow bigger congregations, who in turn are just pew fodder. They sit there week after week, absorbing from the minister but not giving back. They choose to go to this church or that church, depending on how it pleases them, and these church hoppers are the worst of Christians, disloyal, ready to leave when it suits them and not willing to change that body if they do not like it. J F Kennedy said, “ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country" which I would slightly amend to, “ask not what your church can do for you, ask what you can do for your church".

The churches, the gathering of the people, was going to need some thought and this was what the Lord was going to leave to the Apostles to sort out, but not before He had taught them. They did not become fishers of men automatically, but with a little help they learned.

Jesus having spoken to the people from the boat, asks Peter to go fishing. *Luk 5:4 Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught. Luk 5:5 And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net*. There follows the miracle of the “draught of fishes”, *Luk 5:6 And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake. Luk 5:7 And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink. Luk 5:8* ***When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart***

from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord. *Luk 5:9 For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken:*

The point which I take from this incident is that dear Peter was convicted of his sins by the draught, the catch of fish which they had made. Can you find the link between the catch and the conviction of sin? It is difficult to make the connection, and we think that it must always be the preaching of the Gospel which convicts someone of their sin. But the Gospel can so often be preached without words, *1Pe 3:1 If you are a wife, you must put your husband first. Even if he opposes our message, you will win him over by what you do. No one else will have to say anything to him, 1Pe 3:2 because he will see how you honor God and live a pure life.* CEV.

We think that if we do not speak from the Bible that we will have absolutely no effect, but that is far from the truth. I was working away from home with a colleague and in the evening we went out for a meal. The man knew that I was a Christian but I had said nothing to him that day, after all we were working and had a job to do. During the course of the meal, much to my surprise, he suddenly blurted out to me, "you're always speaking about religion". I just stared at him in amazement, wondering what was going through his mind. He must have been thinking about that subject, unknown to me and it suddenly burst from his lips.

Christians often get a bad press for the hypocritical way that some of them behave. The unbeliever can rightly see what they cannot, that their actions do not agree with their statements, *Rom 2:1 Do you, my friend, pass judgment on others? You have no excuse at all, whoever you are. For when you judge others and then do the same things which they do, you condemn yourself. Rom 2:2 We know that God is right when he judges the people who do such things as these. Rom 2:3 But you, my friend, do those very things for which you pass judgment on others! Do you think you will escape God's judgment*?

Our behaviour is one of the most powerful witnesses to the truth of the Gospel. People who show by their behaviour and language, the polar opposite of what Christ taught, do not preach the Gospel. *Col 3:8 But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth.* The drunkard, the gossip, the foul mouth person, the liar, the thief, are all contrary to Christ, and should be rebuked. They show themselves by their nature, not to be in Christ.

Those outside of the faith, look at the person inside the faith, and make a judgement about their hypocrisy and say, "I am having nothing to do with their religion". And they are quite right, and I would have nothing to do with it either. It is all that is wrong with Christianity, it has become a conflict with the idea the faith and the faith itself. *Jas 2:14 My friends, what good is it to say you have faith, when you don't do anything to show that you really do have faith? Can that*

kind of faith save you? Jas 2:15 If you know someone who doesn't have any clothes or food, Jas 2:16 you shouldn't just say, "I hope all goes well for you. I hope you will be warm and have plenty to eat." What good is it to say this, unless you do something to help? Jas 2:17 Faith that doesn't lead us to do good deeds is all alone and dead! CEV.

You can speak in high flown religious words, but that is all they are, hot air, and you can neglect the needs of the person. So many times there is no practical link between what is said and what is done. When Peter went out in that boat, for the second time, he must have had his doubts about going, after all, he had just gone out and it was hopeless, there just weren't any fish. I bet the fishermen grumbled secretly under their breath about Jesus wasting their time. What did Jesus know about fishing, He was just a carpenter?

Imagine the shock of them all when they immediately felt their nets heaving with fish, and so many that they called over their friends to help them. But Peter had seen a connection between the catch of fish and himself, *Luk 5:8 When Simon Peter saw this happen, he knelt down in front of Jesus and said, "Lord, don't come near me! I am a sinner*. What was it that he had seen?

Let us look that word sin, "I am a sinner" he exclaims. What is it in Christ that is the polar opposite of sin, the thing that repels sin? **It is goodness**. Christ had shown Peter His goodness, first in healing his mother-in-law, and now by leaving His preaching to offer Peter some help fishing. His kindness may not have seemed like much on the surface, but to Peter it was something else, and he felt that he could hardly stand in the presence of one so good, so holy. He was overwhelmed by the kindness shown, so unworthy of such attention, he could only ask Jesus to leave him alone.

Peter is no different to the man possessed, who also asked Jesus to leave him alone, but unlike that creature, Jesus says, *Luk 5:10.....And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men. Luk 5:11 And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him.*

What manner of person are you? When the service is over, do you immediately lapse into worldly conversations, go back to what you were doing before, having this time of worship as a time filler. Do you find Christian company boring so that you would much rather spend your time with the world's children engaging in their silliness and filthiness, in opposition to Christ? Well, I must inform you that you will not like heaven and you most probably will not be going there.

Peter had made a first step on that road to heaven, he had an overwhelming conviction of sin. The second step was to follow Christ. Many other steps were on that road, but he had chosen a path he would not regret. His last recorded words

show where he was going, *2Pe 3:18 But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.*

30. The leper cleansed. *Luke 5:12 - 16*

Luk 5:12 And it came to pass, when he was in a certain city, behold a man full of leprosy: who seeing Jesus fell on his face, and besought him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. Luk 5:13 And he put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will: be thou clean. And immediately the leprosy departed from him. Luk 5:14 And he charged him to tell no man: but go, and shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing, according as Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.
Luk 5:15 But so much the more went there a fame abroad of him: and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities. Luk 5:16 And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed.

Leprosy, also known as Hansen's disease, is a chronic infectious disease caused by Mycobacterium leprae, which multiplies slowly and the incubation period of the disease, on average, is 5 years. Symptoms may occur within 1 year but can also take as long as 20 years or even more. It is a bacterial infection of the skin and superficial nerves (in the skin) and may also involve the nose, eyes, throat and testicles. Leprosy is known to occur at all ages ranging from early infancy to very old age. Scientists have learned that to catch leprosy, a healthy person must have months of close contact with someone who has leprosy.

Leprosy attacks the nerves near the surface of the skin where the skin is cooler but the bacterium is killed by the hotter deeper nerves below the surface. This is an account by Dr Paul Brand, in “Pain: the gift nobody wants” (Author: Philip Yancy):

> Their symptoms—blindness, marred faces, paralyzed hands, stumpy fingers and toes, ulcers under the feet—certainly pointed to a disease of the skin and extremities. It had taken me a long time to be more precise in assigning blame. Now I had confirmation that most of the gross deformities and dreaded symptoms of leprosy had the same cruel source: damaged nerves.
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> The patients learned to account for 90 percent of spontaneous wounds. By far the most mystifying injuries involved the sudden disappearance of almost a whole segment of a finger or toe. Every once in a while a leprosy patient would show up at our daily meetings and sheepishly display a raw, bleeding patch, with the flesh around an inch-length section of a finger or big toe missing and bare bone exposed. This oddity defied everything we had learned and, until we solved the

mystery, it put our entire theory in jeopardy. I dared not tell other hospital personnel about the problem, for it seemed to confirm the worst myths about leprous fingers and toes simply “falling off.”

Almost always, the afflicted person noticed the missing digit in the morning. Something ominous was taking place during the night. A patient solved the mystery by sitting up all night in an observation post from which he watched a scene straight out of a horror movie. In the middle of the night a rat climbed onto the bed of a fellow patient, sniffed around tentatively, nuzzled a finger, and, meeting no resistance, began to gnaw on it. The lookout yelled, waking the whole room and scaring away the rat. At last wehad the answer: the boys’ fingers and toes had not dropped off—they were being eaten!

This most repugnant cause of spontaneous wounds had an easy remedy. First we set traps for the rodents and built barriers around the beds of our patients. When trouble continued, we settled on a more effective solution: we went into the cat breeding business, using the blood line of a proven Siamese male who was an excellent ratter. From then on, no leprosy patient could leave the rehabilitation centre without a feline companion. The problem of missing pieces of fingers vanished almost overnight.

In the OT there is a passage which deals with leprosy in the laws of uncleanness. *Lev 13:1 The LORD told Moses and Aaron to say to the people: Lev 13:2 If sores or boils or a skin rash should break out and start spreading on your body, you must be brought to Aaron or to one of the other priests. Lev 13:3 If the priest discovers that the hair in the infected area has turned white and that the infection seems more than skin deep, he will say, "This is leprosy —you are unclean." ..... Lev 13:45 If you ever have leprosy, you must tear your clothes, leave your hair uncombed, cover the lower part of your face, and go around shouting, "I'm unclean! I'm unclean!" Lev 13:46 As long as you have the disease, you are unclean and must live alone outside the camp. CEV.*

What does leprosy signify? I think that it signifies the sins of presumption and pride. The Lord showed the hidden sins of the heart and soul in the outward manifestation of the disease leprosy. Miriam and Uzziah are two of its victims.

1. *Num 12:5 And the LORD came down in the pillar of the cloud, and stood in the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam: and they both came forth. Num 12:6 And he said, Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. Num 12:7 My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house. Num 12:8 With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the*

similitude of the LORD shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses? Num 12:9 And the anger of the LORD was kindled against them; and he departed. Num 12:10 And the cloud departed from off the tabernacle; and, behold, ***Miriam became leprous, white as snow****: and Aaron looked upon Miriam, and, behold, she was leprous. Num 12:11 And Aaron said unto Moses, Alas, my lord, I beseech thee, lay not the sin upon us, wherein we have done foolishly, and wherein we have sinned*.

2. *2Ch 26:19 Then* ***Uzziah*** *was wroth, and had a censer in his hand to burn incense: and while he was wroth with the priests,* ***the leprosy even rose up in his forehead*** *before the priests in the house of the LORD, from beside the incense altar. 2Ch 26:20 And Azariah the chief priest, and all the priests, looked upon him, and, behold, he was leprous in his forehead, and they thrust him out from thence; yea, himself hasted also to go out, because the LORD had smitten him. 2Ch 26:21 And Uzziah the king was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a several house, being a leper; for he was cut off from the house of the LORD: and Jotham his son was over the king's house, judging the people of the land.*

Leprosy was a sign of the upstart heart, rebelling against God, swelling with its own self importance in acts against God and His messengers. I notice the first time the disease occurs in the Bible is in the Exodus (I am not presuming that it had not occurred at all). Moses is given it as the second sign to show Pharaoh, *Exo 4:6 And the LORD said furthermore unto him, Put now thine hand into thy bosom. And he put his hand into his bosom: and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous as snow. Exo 4:7 And he said, Put thine hand into thy bosom again. And he put his hand into his bosom again; and plucked it out of his bosom, and, behold, it was turned again as his other flesh. Exo 4:8 And it shall come to pass, if they will not believe thee, neither hearken to the voice of the first sign, that they will believe the voice of the latter sign*. But the 2nd sign is never mentioned again.

If the 2nd sign was not used why was it given? It is not mentioned again and Scripture remains silent, but the Lord gave it for a purpose. The 2nd sign could have been combined with the 1st sign and not specifically mentioned, the two signs given together to show as part of the first of the plagues on Egypt, *Exo 7:19 And the LORD spake unto Moses, Say unto Aaron,* ***Take thy rod, and stretch out thine hand*** *upon the waters of Egypt, upon their streams, upon their rivers, and upon their ponds, and upon all their pools of water, that they may become blood; and that there may be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, both in vessels of wood, and in vessels of stone*. There is no mention of the rod becoming a serpent or the hand becoming leprous in the smiting of the waters. The sign had been used before pharaoh and his magicians earlier, that is the sign of the rod that became a serpent but not of the leprous hand.

More likely, the sign of the leprous hand was given for Moses benefit and he was convicted by the sign of leprosy and could not bring himself to use it. By putting his hand upon his heart, in his bosom, and seeing it all leprous, must have horrified him. It went to the root of the matter. Here he was, delivering a people, showing superior signs, when his own heart was touched by leprosy. He was in as much need as the Egyptians were, *Rom 3:23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God*; It was no point in Moses thinking, "I am better than the Egyptians", because he wasn't, and Israel wasn't. Israel was in place as long as he remained faithful, and if not he would be cast away.

We see the world falling apart, the Russians and the Ukrainians fighting, and we become outraged at one country being invaded by another, and we become partisan in the face of aggression, but we fail to see that truth, *Rom 3:23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God*; And whether men dies naturally or in war, there still remains a judgement, there comes a reckoning, and all men shall stand before Christ, *2Co 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad*.

These healings so far seem to be linked to the ministry of liberation, *Luk 4:18 The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised*. Not that everyone in the world is healed and some diseases are not even spoken about, such as cancer.

> Our oldest description of cancer (although the word cancer was not used) was discovered in Egypt and dates back to about 3000 BC. Its called the Edwin Smith Papyrus and is a copy of part of an ancient Egyptian textbook on trauma surgery. It describes 8 cases of tumours or ulcers of the breast that were removed by cauterization with a tool called the fire drill. The writing says about the disease, "There is no treatment."
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> The origin of the word cancer is credited to the Greek physician Hippocrates (460-370 BC), who is considered the "Father of Medicine." Hippocrates used the terms *carcinos* and *carcinoma* to describe non-ulcer forming and ulcer-forming tumours. In Greek, these words refer to a crab, most likely applied to the disease because the finger-like spreading projections from a cancer called to mind the shape of a crab. The Roman physician, Celsus (28-50 BC), later translated the Greek term into *cancer*, the Latin word for crab. Galen (130-200 AD), another Greek physician, used the word *oncos* (Greek for swelling) to describe tumours. Although the crab analogy of Hippocrates and Celsus is still used to describe malignant tumours, Galen's term is now used as a part of the name for cancer specialists – oncologists.

Cancer kills 26,000 people a day world wide compared with 13,000 covid deaths a day, at the peak of the pandemic according to the WHO. But when covid dies back there will still be 26,000 cancer deaths. Why did not Jesus heal this disease? It was not healed, I think, because it did not come under the spotlight of OT spiritual diseases. Leprosy, blindness, demon possession, paralysis and suchlike, all have there analogues in spiritual disease.

Although I do not think that healing has passed away, it is far less common, as the purpose of it was to "*preach the gospel to the poor"* and show who had authority to preach, in the first case Jesus, followed by His disciples, who worked a lot of miracles at the start but the frequency seems to decline as the Gospel of the Kingdom becomes established. Although you might argue that the emphasis is more on the teaching and less on the miracles as time went on and so less are recorded. Also you might argue that Acts is only a very small snapshot of the progress of the Gospel, and does not mention what the other Apostles did.

But we must bear in mind this Scripture, *Heb 2:1 Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. Heb 2:2 For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; Heb 2:3 How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; Heb 2:4 God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and* ***gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will****?*

The gifts are according to the Will of God, not men, and that Sovereign Will and not the will of mortal man will prevail. It does not matter what you think, unless it accords with God, it is worthless.

Jesus sends the man away healed, but note this, He sends him to the Priest. Not that He needed to, being God, but the Law of Moses said it was required and so to fulfil all righteousness Jesus sent the man to the priest. We see by this that the OT law had not ceased yet because Jesus sends the man to the priest, "***shew thyself to the priest***". The priests were the arbiters of disease, the persons who had the last say in the matter of cleansing. They were the health officials of their day.

The man was to tell no man, who healed him, but he was told to tell the priest, *Luk 5:14* ***And he charged him to tell no man****: but go, and shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing, according as Moses commanded,* ***for a testimony unto them****.* Jesus did not want the testimony of men but the testimony of the priest. What was done in Galilee had to be brought to the attention of the priests in Jerusalem.

Jesus did not use His healing to bypass the duties of the leper, which was to offer sacrifices, according to the Law, *Lev 14:1 The LORD told Moses to say to the*

people: Lev 14:2 After you think you are healed of leprosy, you must ask for a priest to come outside the camp and examine you. And if you are well, Lev 14:3 (SEE 14:2) Lev 14:4 he will have someone bring out two live birds that are acceptable for sacrifice, together with a stick of cedar wood, a piece of red yarn, and a branch from a hyssop plant. Lev 14:5 The priest will have someone kill one of the birds over a clay pot of spring water. Lev 14:6 Then he will dip the other bird, the cedar, the red yarn, and the hyssop in the blood of the dead bird. Lev 14:7 Next, he will sprinkle you seven times with the blood and say, "You are now clean." Finally, he will release the bird and let it fly away. Lev 14:8 After this you must wash your clothes, shave your entire body, and take a bath before you are completely clean. You may move back into camp, but you must not enter your tent for seven days. Lev 14:9 Then you must once again shave your head, face, and eyebrows, as well as the hair on the rest of your body. Finally, wash your clothes and take a bath, and you will be completely clean. CEV.

The priest would see the leper, clean from his disease, restored to Israel, and I think that he would wonder, “Who did this?”

Also there is another point. The leper was not cleansed in the eyes of God until he had shown himself to the priest. He could be healed but still out of fellowship with God, out of a relationship with God, out of communion with Israel. Healing has, you see, another dimension. To be healed is one thing, to be right with God, that is what counts and that involves the forgiveness of sin.

https://www.gwern.net/docs/psychology/1993-brand-painthegiftnobodywants.pdf The book

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3IATOHifnp0 Dr Paul Brand. Lifted Hands Leprosy treatment. 25 min

31. Defending a god you do not know. *Luke 5:17 - 24*

Luk 5:17 And it came to pass on a certain day, as he was teaching, that there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, which were come out of every town of Galilee, and Judaea, and Jerusalem: and the power of the Lord was present to heal them. Luk 5:18 And, behold, men brought in a bed a man which was taken with a palsy: and they sought means to bring him in, and to lay him before him. Luk 5:19 And when they could not find by what way they might bring him in because of the multitude, they went upon the housetop, and let him down through the tiling with his couch into the midst before Jesus. Luk 5:20 And when he saw their faith, he said unto him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee. Luk 5:21 And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, Who is this which speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone? Luk 5:22 But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answering said unto them, What reason ye in your hearts? Luk 5:23 Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk? Luk 5:24 But that ye may know that the Son of man

hath power upon earth to forgive sins, (he said unto the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house.

We learn from Mark's gospel that this event happened in Capernaum, *Mar 2:1 And again he entered into Capernaum after some days; and it was noised that he was in the house*. During the period of Jesus' activity in the Galilee (beginning of the 1st century AD), it was a large Jewish village. In the Late Roman and Byzantine periods (3rd-7th centuries) it became a prosperous town spread over some 13 acres, along the shore of the Sea of Galilee and the moderate slope to the north. Situated on the northern shore of lake Gennesaret or the Sea of Galilee, it had a population of about 1500 (compare to Hartley Wintney 5000).

This is where so much of Jesus' ministry took place, Mat 4:12 Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee; *Mat 4:13 And leaving Nazareth,* ***he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast,*** *in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim: Mat 4:14 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Mat 4:15 The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan,* ***Galilee of the Gentiles;*** *Mat 4:16 The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up. Mat 4:17 From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*.

Capernaum, such a small and unassuming place in the world but a place where the most important subjects to mankind where brought into full view. O the wisdom of God, that dwarfs mankind, to focus His glory on such people and such a place, where the Saviour spoke the words of life.

What expectations and perceptions surrounded this man Jesus? The perception of Jesus was that He was a man, a gifted man, a man who could do strange things, a man who could restore people to health. This is not unusual in this world, for there are many mediums, faith healers, occult healers and spiritual guides. Faith healing can be classified as a spiritual, supernatural, or paranormal topic, and, in some cases, belief in faith healing can be classified as magical thinking. Does it work? Looking at the number of people who attend such meetings, it is more than likely that it works. I don't want to deal with this subject here, but will say for now, however it works, there are always some

people who will do miracles, very similar to God's miracles, *Exo 7:11 Then Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers: now the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments. Exo 7:12 For they cast down every man his rod, and they became serpents: but Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods*.

Jesus could easily fit in with this crowd of magicians except for one thing. Instead of invoking "god" like all the others, He made Himself to be God. This is the crucial element of His person, and He continually shows His Divinity in the things that He does. Whether men see it is another matter. It is not the same as Elijah, who shows his God as superior to the Canaanites god, and mocks theirs, *1Ki 18:27 And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked. 1Ki 18:28 And they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them*.

Here is Jesus, God showing Himself to the people, dignified and understated, some of whom will not believe, and some who will, and the people who needed most convincing, surprise, surprise, were the religious elite.

There were the doctors of the law, scribes, there were the Pharisees, who had come out from all of Galilee, Judea and Jerusalem to hear Jesus, and so we must assume that Jesus had ministered for a reasonable time to become so well known and famous among the population. These people were eager to hear Him, for we read "they were sitting by", having taken there places already. Here is an opportunity to declare Himself, here is an opportunity to preach the greatest sermon ever, here is the opportunity to put peoples minds at ease concerning who He was. Instead, what does our Lord do? He heals a paralysed man, whose friends have vandalised the roof to gain access to Jesus, and Jesus provokes these religious leaders by forgiving the man's sin.

It was stroke of genius. What better than a practical demonstration of power and authority. Not simply healing the man but forgiving him, having seen his faith and the faith of those who carried him. Jesus did not have to say He was God, the religious leaders would say it for Him, *Luk 5:21 And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, Who is this which speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?*

Indeed who can forgive sins but God alone? Why? Because that which is right and that which is wrong are, in the final court of appeal, settled by Him. God the absolute being, the Creator of all thing, the Master of the Universe is the final, absolute, authority and as He says what is sin, He has the power to forgive sin. It is the right of the Potter, the right to make or break a man, the right to forgive a man.

What do you know about this Supreme being, how did you find out what you think you know and what sort of relationship with Him do you have? Of course you may not believe in Him, but every thing in nature tells you something about God, according to the Scriptures, *Rom 1:19 Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. Rom 1:20 For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse*:

You may see that through the complex design of nature that there must be an intelligent Creator (or if it is a meaningless vastness of space you have no certainty and no moral compass) but you are still far from describing Him. You may be like those ancient Incas, who looked up into the night sky and saw in the stars, animals and places, and from that they used human reason to guess their origin. You may trust in your reasoning to get you some knowledge of God, but can you reason independently of God, the Bible says you cannot, *1Co 2:14 But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them,* ***because they are spiritually discerned****.* We are flawed beings.

God is certainly a mystery, and you will wear yourself out trying to find Him, apart from the revelation of Scripture through the spirit of God, and even then, you may have assessed Him wrongly, misread something, and introduced an error of thinking.

Jesus showed that He was God Almighty and the religious leaders didn't believe Him. That is the central question of faith, "Who is Jesus?" *Mat 22:41 While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, Mat 22:42 Saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The Son of David. Mat 22:43 He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord,* by which Jesus was saying, the OT Psalm 110, was not referring to David, but Himself, and that David was not Adonai, Lord, but He was, Jesus was.

Another example of this recognition is found in Luke's gospel, *Luk 9:18 And it came to pass, as he was alone praying, his disciples were with him: and he asked them, saying, Whom say the people that I am? Luk 9:19 They answering said, John the Baptist; but some say, Elias; and others say, that one of the old prophets is risen again. Luk 9:20 He said unto them, But whom say ye that I am? Peter answering said,* ***The Christ of God……****Mat 16:15 He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? Mat 16:16 And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. Mat 16:17 And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona:* ***for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven***. But it was revealed by the Father.

The leaders had failed to see Him for who He was, and I suppose the people to a degree followed their leaders. They were defending a “god” that they did not know. They were saying that Jesus was a blasphemer, because they could not see His deity. They were implying, “our God wouldn’t let a “man” like you represent Him, and therefore a man like you, cannot be God”. Their theology was broken, like so many leaders of religion who speak authoritatively but without authority, on what God is capable of and what He is not. They hold such a view of God, that we might think the religious leaders were themselves divine. But they are like ventriloquists making up the words of a god, putting words into His mouth, instead of living by the words God actually said.

Now why didn’t Jesus declare Himself plainly, that He was the Messiah and that He was God? It’s a good question. Jesus could have said, ”I am the Lord your God” and that would be a declaration to all mankind throughout the ages, putting an end to all questions. It would have settled all debate, stopped theological arguments and more than likely stifled some heretical religious denominations and saved some lives. It would have been a confirmation of who He was and what He would do, similar to what He did before with Moses, yes Jesus spoke to Moses, *Exo 6:7 And I will take you to me for a people, and* ***I will be to you a God****: and ye shall know that I am the LORD your God, which bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians*.

But this time around He did not say He was God. He did show in His works that He was God, but you had to take it by faith, *Joh 10:24 Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly. Joh 10:25 Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. Joh 10:26* ***But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you****.*

He had gone out to them in the past, when the people were led by Moses, openly, plainly declaring Himself God, now since that did no good, He would only show Himself to the faithful, *Rom 10:20 But Esaias is very bold, and saith, I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me. Rom 10:21 But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people.*

Admittedly John states that Christ is the Creator, and God, *Joh 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and* ***the Word was God****. Joh 1:2 The same was in the beginning with God. Joh 1:3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. Joh 1:4 In him was life; and the life was the light of men*. But Jesus does not say it for Himself, or of Himself directly, but John does so as part of his narrative.

But you must see that John is writing His Gospel **AFTER** Christ rose, and as we have noted before the Gospel of John is written for a particular purpose, *Joh 20:30 And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: Joh 20:31 But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name*.

As far as I am ware, Jesus does not make a plain, absolutely clear, beyond doubt, a self declaration of His Deity during His life on earth.

It is by faith, with the eyes of faith, through faith, faith alone, and that is the blessing, *Mat 5:8 Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God*. Two men may stand in front of Jesus, one sees by faith and the other by sight. One sees God the other, well, he sees only the man Jesus. We have the eyes of faith and Jesus has the knowledge of faith and recognises it, *Luk 5:20 And when he saw their faith, he said unto him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee.*

It is at this point that Jesus says something which none of the faith healers or occultists say. He says, "*Man, thy sins are forgiven thee".* He sings with the voice of heaven's language, which no man knows except the sinner saved, "*thy sins are forgiven thee"* and only those who have an ear to hear, truly know what He is saying.

You can be baptised and healed but not forgiven, because you do not want what Jesus offers you. You can spend a lifetime in religious services, in a church, yet fail to hear this voice which tells you your sins are forgiven. You defend a "god" who needs no defending but you refuse to acknowledge you sins against Him, and you shut your ears to the heavenly voice which cries in vain "*man your sins are forgiven thee".*

In doing so we become like the Pharisees and Doctors of the law, *2Ti 3:5 Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.* Jesus has a word for us, *Mat 7:22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? Mat 7:23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity*.

32. Next steps.

The paralyzed man has been forgiven of his sins, just as he has been healed and Jesus is the one who has had the power, the authority, over that process. Are we to assume that as the man's body ages and illness returns, so too will the

forgiveness of sin decline? I want us today, to look at the process of forgiveness and just what it means to be forgiven.

It is more than saying “sorry” for sin, for that can be just like any other common phrase, “good day” or “bless you” or “how are you”. They are words we use every day but with seldom any deep sincerity, they are said in passing. When we come to Christ as that paralyzed man did, I hope that we really considered what He did for us.

The forgiveness of man requires much more than coming to God and saying sorry. Let us just consider it from God’s position. *Heb 8:10 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: Heb 8:11 And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. Heb 8:12 For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more*.

God says He will make a covenant with us and write His laws in our hearts and no longer remember our sins. These go together, covenant, laws in heart and forgiveness. No covenant no forgiveness, no laws in the heart no forgiveness. They are all part and parcel of the deal, but I want to look at forgiveness only today.

Jesus says to the crippled man, “*Man, thy sins are forgiven thee*.” He says sins. The whole of the sin, every sin that the man had committed against man, and every sin the man had committed against God were forgiven. *Heb 8:12 For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.* The sins were not retained, held in some cupboard to be brought out and laid again at his door when he failed his Lord. They were erased from God’s memory. This is a self limitation of God, whereby He chooses to forgive and forget.

I point out in passing, that the same nature should be in us, that having been forgiven, we too, freely forgive and forget. *Mat 18:33 Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? Mat 18:34 And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. Mat 18:35 So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.* You do not rake up another’s past sins, forgiven sins, as a child of God. This is seen by God not bringing any charges of sin against His children, when they have passed on to heaven, and you can see this by a look at Hebrews chapter 11, *Heb 11:39 And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise*: Not one sin is mentioned only the good they did.

God chooses to erase sins, but what of the sins we commit the next day? The hard drive is clean but we start writing “sins” on it. As surely as day follows night, the sins begin to accumulate again. Some small black dots appear on the once pristine, wiped clean soul. Sometimes we do not know how they got there, they just appeared, little sins, like the little foxes that spoil the vines, spots on our love feasts, but slowly they accumulate, and we know not where they came from. They are the sins against God that as yet, we do not know as sins, but we shall with time, as we are progressively sanctified.

What can we do? I am like the “house swept and garnished”, all ready for some more unwanted guests, *Luk 11:24 When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out. Luk 11:25 And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished. Luk 11:26 Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first*.

Surely I am worse off having been forgiven, than if I had not been forgiven? What do we do about our sin subsequent to being forgiven? It is like the Day of Atonement, when everything was restored to fellowship with the Lord, and I think that we must learn to live in the Day of Atonement. We must hold every day as that day was held, a day of affliction of you soul, *Lev 16:30 For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the LORD. Lev 16:31 It shall be a sabbath of rest unto you, and ye shall afflict your souls, by a statute for ever.*

I hear you say, not so, for Christ put away our sins with one offering, why are you going again and again to partake of the sacrifice that He did once and for all time, *Heb 10:14 For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.* So He did, He put them away, by His single sacrifice, *Heb 9:25 Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; Heb 9:26 For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself*.

It is one offering for sin buy Christ but I must go to the altar many times to partake of forgiveness. I have to wash in that blood regularly, *1Jn 1:6 If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: 1Jn 1:7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. 1Jn 1:8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 1Jn 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*.

This passage requires learning by heart. We are still sinners even though we are forgiven, and we deceive ourselves if we say that we are sinless. I don't believe in sinless perfection, because that would be a denial of my own sinful nature. I would not be walking in the light of God, because I had no need to, having arrived at a state of perfection. If I walk in the light of God, the blood of Christ's still cleanses me and will go on cleansing me until I go to Glory. If I am ready to confess my sin, acknowledge my sin, He will forgive my sin.

It is NOT like a vaccination. You get vaccinated to avoid catching the virus (although it did not work in every case of Covid 19). Once you had the vaccination you hope you can avoid the disease, like smallpox, diphtheria or measles. You are protected from these, hopefully for life. Forgiveness of sin is not like that. You do not get a one time injection from Christ to make you protected from sins for all time. You constantly keep getting bouts of sin. What Christ does is protect you as long as you are in Him. You never become a protected being by standing alone, you are protected by being sheltered in Christ.

The blood of Christ works to forgive all sin, even the sins committed after we come to Christ. It is the continual reminder that we need it and that reminder is provided for us at the Lord's Table. *1Co 11:25 After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. 1Co 11:26 For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. 1Co 11:27 Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord*.

A soul that forgets he is a sinner, is a soul on the way to hell. The sacrifices for sins are critical in understanding the comprehensiveness of that sacrifice. It became clearer when the law was codified under Moses, but there was an understanding of sacrifices from the moment Christ killed the animals in the garden to give Adam. Christ was there too.

The various sacrifices and the laws surrounding them are found mainly in the book of Leviticus. It seems a wasteful process, to kill an innocent animal, to cut it up, flay it and burn it, just to make a point about sin. *Lev 1:1 And the LORD called unto Moses, and spake unto him out of the tabernacle of the congregation, saying, Lev 1:2 Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, If any man of you bring an offering unto the LORD, ye shall bring your offering of the cattle, even of the herd, and of the flock. Lev 1:3 If his offering be a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish: he shall offer it of his own voluntary will at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the LORD. Lev 1:4 And he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering; and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him. Lev 1:5 And he shall kill the bullock before the LORD: and the priests, Aaron's sons, shall bring*

the blood, and sprinkle the blood round about upon the altar that is by the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. Lev 1:6 And he shall flay the burnt offering, and cut it into his pieces. Lev 1:7 And the sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire upon the altar, and lay the wood in order upon the fire: Lev 1:8 And the priests, Aaron's sons, shall lay the parts, the head, and the fat, in order upon the wood that is on the fire which is upon the altar: Lev 1:9 But his inwards and his legs shall he wash in water: and the priest shall burn all on the altar, to be a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, of ***a sweet savour unto the LORD***.

It was "***a sweet savour unto the LORD***", a perfume to His nostrils, and what smelled to us like a crematorium was just the opposite to God. That is what Sin does to man and what atonement does to God. Man stinks of sin, but in offering up the sacrifice, there is the purging of that sin, a reconciliation with God and the smell of righteousness.

The offerings in Leviticus all have something to do with our sin. Why else would we sacrifice a substitute for us, if we had not wronged God? Why did Christ die if it had not been for our sins?

I think that the national consciousness of sin was higher in the OT. I must distinguish between consciousness and conscience. By that I mean that although the conscience was always there in some, reproving them for doing wrong, the consciousness, the awareness of doing wrong, is less present in the church, than in the nation of Israel. Let me explain. If a person sins, as a member of the church, it is largely hidden from the congregation. You can still maintain you place in the congregation, even hypocritically, by covering it up. If you sinned in Israel, you had to publicly make an offering, and generally, the people would have known roughly what sin you had committed by the type of offering you made. Sin, for the honest Israelite, was an open matter.

Whether this is a more recent phenomenon or whether it has been so throughout the history of Christianity, I do not know. But what I see are churches where the whole subject of sin is not spoken about. It is a rare subject to preach on and if preached at all, it is a theological belief and dealt with as an intellectual subject, not as something extremely relevant to the heart of man. The people would sooner spend time jigging round to music, which has much in common to the world, rather than examining their soul, *Rom 7:18 For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. Rom 7:19 For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do*. That man Paul had got his priorities right in seeing how sin affected him.

It was what the paralysed man really needed, the forgiveness of his sins. He didn't need a raft of sermons on love, do gooding, speaking in tongues, social responsibility, is God going to save the world, how to overcome and so on. His

need was this that Jesus offered him, forgiveness, and all the sermons in the world wouldn't make the slightest difference to the man, except he heard the voice saying, "you are forgiven".

He would come to thank God for the day he was paralyzed, because if that had not happened, he would have been well, and had no need to come to Jesus. He would have been off working, off playing, off doing something other than searching for truth, with no physical cares he would have gone his way, not even looking for Christ. But God gave him a kindly nudge and he is given a reason to seek Jesus. If it were not for his condition and the subsequent desperation that he and his companions felt by going to great lengths to get to Jesus, he would have remained in his sins.

There is often that need created in the heart of man, that makes him turn to Jesus, *Mar 2:17 When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.* Until you become ill you do not need a doctor, and perhaps we should not get angry with people who reject the Gospel. They can do nothing else. Unless they see a need in their life, they will not come to Jesus. Perhaps we should pray for them that they would have a need?

What right did Jesus have to say what He said? *Luk 5:23 Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? Luk 5:24 But so you may know that the Son of Man has* ***authority*** *on earth to pardon sins...." He said to the paralyzed one, "I tell you, get up and take your cot, and go home!"* TLV.

Words are easily said, whether "*arise and walk*" or "*your sins are forgiven*". If words are to have any meaning they must be backed up with actions. To say "*arise and walk*" and the man gets up shows that you are a healer (of whatever type) and shows you can heal. To say "*your sins are forgiven*" and the man gets up and walks, shows that God does not disrespect that command to "*arise and walk*". If God did not respect Jesus nothing would have happened.

It still left some of the people in confusion. It certainly had been a strange day in Capernaum, *Luk 5:26 And they were all amazed, and they glorified God, and were filled with fear, saying, We have seen strange things to day.*

33. A publican called Levi. *Luke 5:27 - 32*

Luk 5:27 And after these things he went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto him, Follow me. Luk 5:28 And he left all, rose up, and followed him. Luk 5:29 And Levi made him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them. Luk 5:30 But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners? Luk 5:31 And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a

physician; but they that are sick. Luk 5:32 I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

In passages parallel to Matthew 9:9, both Mark 2:14 and Luke 5:27 describe Jesus' calling of the tax collector Levi, the son of Alphaeus, but Mark and Luke never explicitly equate this Levi with the Matthew named as one of the twelve apostles, only Matthew does.

Mat 9:9 And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him…….. Mar 2:14 And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him……. Luk 5:27 And after these things he went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto him, Follow me.

Fancy getting a tax collector as a Disciple?

> "Tax collectors were very despised because they collected taxes for Rome, but Jesus saw this as an opportunity to teach that everyone was accepted by Jesus if they believed. During the time of Jesus, Israel was divided into various territories that were governed by the descendants of Herod the Great, but Judea was an Imperial territory governed by a Roman procurator and the taxes were very high there. Wealthy Jews would bid for the position of tax collector and get even richer by adding a substantial fee above whatever was owed. There were also publicans like Matthew who collected taxes for customs or tolls on imports, exports, and merchants who came to buy or sell in Israel. The religious leaders especially despised the tax collectors and they were considered unclean because of their contact with Romans. Their testimonies were rejected in court and they were not redeemable under the Law of Moses. When Jesus made friends with the tax collectors His ministry was immediately under suspect."

This man was among the most despised of Israel, he was hated for his profession, and even today we do not like the people who take our money for some godless purpose. Surely this was a bad choice, one we would not have made. If you want to start a moral crusade surely you are off to a bad start if you choose someone who is not popular. Why not choose a famous gladiator, an academic, an all around "good guy"? But these are the choices of the world and the world will go after its own, but to take a disreputable vessel and fill it with the perfume of God, you have to look at that vessel and wonder what change, what grace has been poured out on it. He is a picture painted by God, warts and all but a sanctified one at that.

Who is Matthew and what is his Gospel? The Gospel of Matthew's author is anonymous, but Matthew the Apostle is traditionally considered the author. The early church claimed he wrote it, and the attribution "according to Matthew" was added possibly as early as the second century. While there are arguments against his authorship, no alternative writer has been named.

> The earliest evidence that he may have written it comes from Papias of Hierapolis, as quoted by Eusebius of Caesarea in Church History: "So then Matthew wrote the oracles in the Hebrew language, and every one interpreted them as he was able." Irenaeus, who lived from about 130 AD to 202 AD, made a similar claim in Against Heresies: "Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome, and laying the foundations of the Church."
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> As a tax collector, Matthew's job would've involved meticulously recording and documenting tax information. Some argue that the Gospel of Matthew includes internal evidence linking it to Matthew's profession, which could indicate he was the biblical author. The Gospel of Matthew talks about money in more detail and greater frequency than the other gospels, similar to how the Gospel of Luke, written by Luke the physician, includes greater detail about ailments and uses precise medical terminology.
>
> Gold and silver are only mentioned once in Mark, and four times in Luke. But Matthew mentions them 28 times. The famous parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-20) only appears in the Gospel of Matthew. And in the Lord's Prayer, Matthew makes a curious substitution. Compare this line in the prayer as recorded by Luke and Matthew, *Luk 11:4 And* ***forgive us our sins****; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil…….Mat 6:12* ***And forgive us our debts****, as we forgive our debtors.*
>
> Matthew also uses money-related words the other gospels don't. He tells us the precise amount of the temple tax, *Mat 17:24 And when they came to Capernaum, those who received the didrachmas came to Peter and said, Does your teacher not pay the didrachmas?* It seems that the author paid particular attention to Jesus' statements about money.

How strange that a man called Levi should be working for the Romans as a tax collector. His patronym implies that he was of the tribe of Levi, and I would hardly reckon of him being called by the name of a tribe, if he were not connected with it. What a terrible fall from grace, from the noble priesthood to a tax collector? From a tribe dedicated to the things of God to another tribe

dedicated to the things of Mammon. Jesus famously said, *Luk 16:13 No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon*.

But Jesus was about to call him away from his old master to another, *Luk 5:27 And after these things he went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto him, Follow me. Luk 5:28 And he left all, rose up, and followed him.* In the account in Matthews Gospel, it says, *Mat 9:9 And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, **named Matthew**, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him*.

Am I wrong to presume that Jesus already knew Matthew, because He knew his name? Seated as he was in a prominent place, day in and day out, collecting taxes in Capernaum, he would be well known, even notorious. The thick skinned Jewish servant of Rome, Matthew, was relentless in his collecting. Jesus may have spoken to him already, many times, and this is not as spontaneous as it seems, but **the gradual working** of the Lord. Finally he saw that it was all for nothing, this world's money was nothing compared with the treasure in Heaven and so he meekly leaves his tax desk and follows Jesus.

I said gradual working, because I am not certain that a person gets a change of understanding in an instant. Saved, yes, that can be done in an instant to an individual, but that process of realisation and acceptance of the truth takes time. That appreciation of the vast scope of redemption, conducted on your behalf doesn't come in a flash. The knowledge of the Scripture isn't granted at once, in fact you have to mine it to get the treasure out.

I look back on my salvation and I really knew nothing of the Lord. It took me two weeks to find my own bible in a second hand bookshop. In fact it took me many years to come to a stable understanding of what had happened to me and I think that I am "more saved" now than then. It is only in the last 10 years that I can honestly say I have thrown off the "religion" that misguides me and taken on the Christ of Scripture. The world view of Christ's Kingdom overcomes and replaces the world view of the kingdom of men, the old man is put off and the new man takes precedence over his corpse, and the mind of Christ can take over our lives, *Rom 12:2 Stop living in accordance with the customs of this world, but by the new ideals that mold your minds continue to transform yourselves, so as to find and follow God's will; that is, what is good, well-pleasing to Him, and perfect*. Williams.

Matthew has just started on a long journey of Faith, and straightway, in his own home he learns an important lesson, Jesus came to save sinners, *Mat 9:10 And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and*

sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples. Mat 9:11 And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners? Mat 9:12 But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. Mat 9:13 But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

Homo sapiens, I think not, homo pinhead, yes, because man in infinitely tiny in stature and in processing ability compared with God. Luke records, *Luk 5:29 And Levi made him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them. Luk 5:30 But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners? Luk 5:31 And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. Luk 5:32 I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*

The Pharisees see it as a matter of religion who you eat with and that you are defiling yourself by mixing with sinners, and they are right in their observation. Paul says something quite similar*, 2Co 6:14 Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? 2Co 6:15 And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? 2Co 6:16 And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 2Co 6:17 Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you*,..... and, *1Co 5:11 But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat*.

The Pharisees were right to keep from company that would defile them morally, *1Co 15:33 Do not be fooled. "Bad companions ruin good character."* GNB. The company you keep can define you, and that company will eventually bring you down. If you drink regularly with fools you are in danger of becoming a fool. I think that the whole issue of separatism dated back to the period of the captivity and they saw themselves, at least, as different from those around them. To give them the benefit of the doubt, they were trying to keep themselves unspotted by the world.

But also the unbeliever may be a genuinely nice person, not trying to corrupt you, having a high set of moral values, not at all like the people Paul mentions in Corinthians. Is a friendship with those people off limits too, after all aren't we in danger of throwing the baby out with the bathwater?

When I became a Christian, I went totally over to the side of the Pharisees and was very wary of the company I kept. There was a reason. I was not a nice person before I met Jesus, and I knew the bad company I formerly kept would bring me down with it, if I gave it half a chance. I didn't see the devil in the scheme of things and did not know how to fight him, and so I isolated myself. As I got stronger in the Lord and less pharisaic, I relaxed more in the company of the unbeliever, although not completely. The problem was in me not in the company.

But that company, the unbeliever, had a different problem. Whereas I was trying to avoid being corrupted, they did not know about sin or did not even care about it. The people you mix with either want the Lord or else they disparage Him. It is in continuance of these "unfruitful works of darkness" that we are snared, *Eph 5:11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.* Yes, they are unfruitful, they yield nothing of life and they will utterly perish and possibly you with them.

We think that by having a partial relationship with people who oppose Christ, hanging out with them in the hope that we might just say something, and we justify our position of being there with them. Well, you don't have to hang out with them, and if you have said your piece there is no more that you can do. Be careful that you do not use this as an excuse to indulge yourself in unbelieving company. Jesus did not "hang out" with these people, but He would not avoid their company to get His message across. After He had given the message, that was an end of it, and He did not need to labour the point, say it again, plead with individuals. This is God talking and you and I neglect to hear Him at our peril.

Jesus never had supper, as far as I am aware, at Matthews house every night, and it is not recorded that He had it again. Jesus did not linger over His wine and have idle chat with the persons around Him, Jesus did not engage in filthy conversation or tell jokes about others, Jesus did not lower the tone of the meeting with worldly talk and unseemly behaviour. What was Jesus doing, deliberately eating with these people? He was meeting them with a purpose, *Luk 5:31 And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. Luk 5:32 I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*

He does not go against the Pharisaic behaviour but rather says, you do your thing and I will do mine. If I do something wrong then you can say so, but there are some of these people here who are sick and in need of healing. I do not come to call you righteous to repentant, but I come to call the sinners to repentance.

To the Pharisees He might have said, "you stick in your holy huddle, but don't you see that there are people perishing, don't you see that you can reach out to

them, without defiling yourself, if you have been shown mercy and forgiveness, then at least can you not show it to others".

Now if we had that attitude of Jesus, it would be fine but I am afraid we do not. We would like to think we do, but we get caught up in the pleasantries of the world, and before you know it, you couldn't tell us Christians from the unbeliever.

Jesus had a limited amount of time on earth, and He used it well. His mission was to do the will of God. It occupied Him totally, and we never see Him at leisure, or being idle. And thank God that He was diligent because we are the beneficiaries of it.

34. Fasting. *Luke 5:33 - 35*

Luk 5:33 And they said unto him, Why do the disciples of John fast often, and make prayers, and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees; but thine eat and drink? Luk 5:34 And he said unto them, Can ye make the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? Luk 5:35 But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days.

When I came to the Lord, I saw that Christians fasted, and therefore I would do the same. I did not understand fasting properly, other than that you did not eat, and I blundered in to something I did not have a lot of knowledge of, but I did have a desire to please the Lord. I determined on such and such a day, to fast, and in the morning of the day appointed I would awake, thinking about food. I can honestly say that it was a battle between concentrating on God and being distracted by the thought of food. Sometimes I would fast for weight loss and count that religious fasting. I would welcome the end of my fast as a great physical achievement, but seldom consider if it had yielded anything spiritual.

A day's fast was quite enough, and I could never bring myself to do more, in fact I had not even considered how long a person should fast for. I just did it because it was done, *Luk 18:11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. Luk 18:12* ***I fast twice in the week****, I give tithes of all that I possess.* I was in danger of ticking off my religious duties, just like the Pharisee.

There does not appear to be an imposition on how long you should fast for, a law of fasting, or even rules as to how you should conduct yourself. It is not the time that counts but the sincerity. *Isa 58:3 Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your*

labours. Isa 58:4 Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high. Isa 58:5 Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD? Isa 58:6 ***Is not this the fast that I have chosen?*** *to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Isa 58:7 Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Isa 58:8 Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy rereward*.

The replacement of one sort of fast with another work is not a substitution, it does not say you give up physical fasting for good works. It does say that God wants us to replace the strife and debate, get rid of oppression, and instead to feed the hungry, take care of the poor, and that replaces physical fasting by an imagined fast. He says that a true fast, what He wants to see, considers what the issues are and gets rid of evil and does good. What point is there in fasting when we continue to do evil? *Hos 6:6 For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings*. That does not mean that the Jews should give up sacrifice and offerings in favour of mercy. It is showing us the priority of God, that people should first have mercy, before sacrifice and do the unseen works before the one's that show, *Joe 2:13 And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil*. Fasting must not hold double standards.

I said that I did not find a time limit on fasting, and that is up to the individual. It may be extreme fasting, fasting supported by God, *Mat 4:2 And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred*, and it may be much shorter in time. Here is a list which shows the variability.

1. A 1-day fast (sunrise to sunset). *Jdg 20:26 Then all the children of Israel, and all the people, went up, and came unto the house of God, and wept, and sat there before the LORD, and* ***fasted that day until even****, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD*, to seek direction from the Lord.
2. A 3-day fast without food or drink. *Est 4:16 Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink* ***three days****, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish*, for wisdom, discernment, protection, and guidance.

3. A 7-day fast. *1Sa 31:12 All the valiant men arose, and went all night, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Bethshan, and came to Jabesh, and burnt them there. 1Sa 31:13 And they took their bones, and buried them under a tree at Jabesh, and* ***fasted seven days***.
4. A 10-day fast of vegetables and water only. *Dan 1:11 Then said Daniel to Melzar, whom the prince of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, Dan 1:12 Prove thy servants, I beseech thee,* ***ten days****; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink*.
5. A 14-day fast. *Act 27:33 And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take meat, saying,* ***This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting****, having taken nothing. Act 27:34 Wherefore I pray you to take some meat: for this is for your health: for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you.*
6. A 21-day fast. *Dan 10:2 In those days I Daniel was mourning three full weeks. Dan 10:3 I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth, neither did I anoint myself at all, till* ***three whole weeks were fulfilled****. Daniel 10:3, for times of distress and mourning*.
7. A 40-day fast. There are only three 40-day fasts in the Bible. *Exo 34:28 And he was there with the LORD* ***forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread, nor drink water.*** *And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments…….1Ki 19:7 And the angel of the LORD came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee. 1Ki 19:8 And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God……Luk_4:2 Being forty days tempted of the devil. And in those days he did eat nothing: and when they were ended, he afterward hungered.*

I digress for a moment, but I am sure that it does not pass your observation that Moses and Elijah appeared with Christ on the Mount of the Transfiguration, *Luk 9:30 And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias: Luk 9:31 Who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem*. Did they fast because of the journey from this life to the next, "*went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights",* from an earthly mountain to Mount Zion above? All three of the persons on the mount of Transfiguration had fasted forty days.

Moses and Elijah both had visited the same place in their lifetime, Mt. Horeb which is aka Mt. Sinai. Both of these men had been escaping from the repressive wicked rulers, Moses from Pharaoh, Elijah from Ahab and Jezebel, *1Ki 16:30 And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD above all that were before him*. Jesus is pitted against the Power behind Pharaoh and Ahab, namely satan. If Jesus can cut the head off of the snake, He wins.

> "Shortly after arriving at Mt. Sinai or Horeb, Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, visited Moses and advised him on how to govern the people (Ex 18). Moses then ascended the mountain and received the law from God, as well as instructions for constructing the Tabernacle (Ex 19-31). This was followed by the sin of the golden calf and its aftermath (Ex 32-34). Skilled craftsmen among the Israelites constructed the Tabernacle and its furnishings under Moses' supervision (Ex 35-40). The first Passover was celebrated exactly one year after leaving Egypt (Nm 9:1). Before departing, more laws were given (Lev 1-27) and a census was taken (Num 1-10).
>
> When the Israelites left Mt. Sinai, God's presence went with them and the mountain no longer was a significant religious centre . Mt. Sinai appeared in recorded Biblical history only one more time. Nearly six centuries after the Israelites were at Mt. Sinai, Elijah fled to 'Horeb, the mountain of God' to escape the wrath of Queen Jezebel following his encounter with the priests of Baal at Mt. Carmel (1 Kgs 19:1-21). All told, some 63 chapters of the Old Testament are devoted to events that took place at Mt. Sinai. This amounts to 14 percent of the 436 historical narrative chapters from Genesis to Esther. After Elijah's visit, Mt. Sinai dropped out of Biblical history, and its location faded from the remembrance of God's people."

Is Jesus talking to Moses and Elijah about coming with Him, on the Exodus which He would accomplish from earth, to the heavenly Jerusalem, from Horeb to Heaven? *Luk 9:31 Appearing in glory, they spoke of His **exodus**, which He was about to accomplish in Jerusalem*. LITV. The OT was not worthless because the NT came to being. The former covenant waxed old but did not wax irrelevant, it still had a place, for it showed Christ in His various offices, in types and shadows, so that mankind was without an excuse for having rejected Him. All of it goes to Heaven, the old and the new, and all of it has a place there.

Returning to our subject, we see fasting is an attitude that is observed by God, and God alone, *Mat 6:16 Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. Mat 6:17 But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; Mat 6:18 **That thou appear***

not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly*.*

Fasting is to God alone and He alone rewards it. It is like a hunger strike. Showing that you are willing to starve to death, because you are consumed with your need. How many of our prayers extend that far.

What is the motivation for fasting? *Joe 2:12 Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye even to me* ***with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning****: Joe 2:13 And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil. Joe 2:14 Who knoweth if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him; even a meat offering and a drink offering unto the LORD your God?* It is a whole hearted fast that comes through tears and sorrow.

I would consider the primary motive for fasting as sorrow, but not exclusively, *1Sa 1:6 And her adversary also provoked her sore, for to make her fret, because the LORD had shut up her womb. 1Sa 1:7 And as he did so year by year, when she went up to the house of the LORD, so she provoked her; therefore she wept, and did not eat. 1Sa 1:8 Then said Elkanah her husband to her, Hannah, why weepest thou? and why eatest thou not? and why is thy heart grieved? am not I better to thee than ten sons?* You can no longer eat for worry and sorrow, and this in turn leads to seeking the Lord with the whole heart.

When we fast, we are doing something that affects our well being. In the “hierarchy of needs”, food comes out at the top. Its just how we are made, and we not only eat to live, we eat for the social occasions food makes with friends. I can give money to charities and that affects my pocket, but if I do not eat, that affects my life. When I fast, I am neglecting my body because something more important has come to mind. When I hunger I am putting my life on the line. When sorrow for someone’s circumstance, sorrow for their need becomes all consuming, then I really turn to God and in doing so, I concentrate on petitioning Him in a way that prayer does not always do.

Sometimes we opt out of real bodily hardship, in favour of the softer option, prayers, not that I am denigrating prayer, but it seems to be less hard on the soul. Are we really concerned what we pray about, for example, can you remember the things of concern to you a week ago? We have a list of things we think God should do for us and others, and we repeat it day in day out, and there the concern ends. But if we really want something, and it becomes all consuming, an obsession, a sorrow of the soul, so that we will not let go of God until we get the blessing, then it becomes a reality, *Gen 32:24 And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. Gen 32:25 And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the*

hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him. Gen 32:26 And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, ***I will not let thee go, except thou bless me***.

Fasting is something you should study for yourself and it is still something I am studying. I do not have all the answers to this great mystery and neither have I done so great a subject justice. But I hope that we will come to see what it means to deprive ourselves, *Dan 9:3 And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes*: Daniel used prayer, supplication, fasting, sackcloth and ashes, to show that he had set himself, as he was, in true submission to God, a creature who set himself as nothing, who abased himself to know the will of God.

For Jesus disciples, they had only joy in the presence of their Lord but the time of sorrow was coming and then they would fast.

35. New and old. *Luke 5:36 - 39*

Luk 5:36 And he spake also a parable unto them; No man putteth a piece of a new garment upon an old; if otherwise, then both the new maketh a rent, and the piece that was taken out of the new agreeth not with the old. Luk 5:37 And no man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish. Luk 5:38 But new wine must be put into new bottles; and both are preserved. Luk 5:39 No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith, The old is better.

This is the first recording of a parable given by Jesus, one of many parabolic sayings. It is a simple story, and even a child could understand the wisdom of it. You do not put fermenting wine in old wineskins because they go bang, they burst. The people would see this practical wisdom over and over again in their lives, so much so that it would become a proverb, a byword for perhaps being “penny wise and pound foolish”.

Jesus parables are two-edged. There is that worldly story and there is that other spiritual story. *Mat 13:10 And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? Mat 13:11 He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. Mat 13:12 For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Mat 13:13* ***Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand****. Mat 13:14 And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: Mat 13:15 For this people's heart is*

waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should ***be converted****, and I should heal them. Mat 13:16 But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear*.

It was not to help people understand the mysteries of the Kingdom that Jesus spoke in parables, to the contrary, it was to confuse, because not all men were given to see the message. Part of the people would have understood what was being said and the others standing right there beside them would get a different message. It was deliberately ambivalent, not a plain simple message, for it contained the seeds of confusion, which would be sown in the minds of the unconverted. *Mat 13:13* ***Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.***

Jesus was not going to convert everyone and He did not dumb down the Gospel, not labouring to make every man understand the message. The words He spoke were sufficient but He left it to the Father to save those whom He had chosen. He left it to God to open the ears of the deaf and eyes of the blind.

Well, why do I go to the extent of explaining things when Jesus did not? Am I working against the purpose of parables? I am not ministering to the unconverted, because they have no interest what so ever in the things of God. Those who do not believe in Jesus will not understand these proverbs as instruction in the Kingdom and disregard the sayings of Jesus any way. So I will not contradict the will of God.

He spoke to ”them”, the disciples of John, and He gave them this parable, *Mat 9:14 Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not?* It was a parable of patches, of burst wineskins, and of new wine. Why so much about wine when John’s did not drink and his disciples followed him? That was a clue to what He was saying.

Let us take an overview of the times that we are going through before we examine the parable. This is important because it sets the parable in its historic context first, to understand why it is given. The New Testament proper, begins when Jesus is raised from the dead and the Spirit of God comes upon the Apostles at Pentecost, 50 days after the resurrection. From that time there is an ingathering of the gentiles also, and the Gospel spreads. It was as Jesus said at His ascension, *Act 1:8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth*. Although all was in place for the Gospel to be broadcast, they never the less, had to wait for the Power of that Gospel to hit them, namely, The Holy Spirit.

Going backwards from Pentecost we have the crucifixion. The Old Testament is firmly in place right up to the moment of Christ's death, *Joh 19:30 When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.* Have you considered what "**it is finished**" means? The CEV puts it this way, *Joh 19:30 After Jesus drank the wine, he said, "**Everything is done**!" He bowed his head and died*. Jesus in quoting the 22nd Psalm. It was written by Him and for Him, and it told of this very day, from the cry of the Cross, *Psa 22:2 My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?* Until the end of the Psalm which says this:

*Psa 22:28 All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to Adonai. All the families of the nations will bow down before You. Psa 22:29 For the kingdom belongs to Adonai, and He rules over the nations. Psa 22:30 All the rich of the earth will feast and worship. Everyone who goes down to the dust will kneel before Him—even the one who could not keep his own soul alive. Psa 22:31 His posterity will serve him, telling the next generation about my Lord. Psa 22:32 They will come and declare His righteousness to a people yet to be born—**because He has done it**!* TLV.

The Passion Translation brings the verse of the OT even closer to the NT, *Psa 22:31 His generation yet to be born will glorify him. And they will all declare, "**It is finished**!"* The work of redemption is accomplished.

Going back further in time before the crucifixion, a transition occurs, the OT must give way to the NT. That is where John the Baptist enters history. John does not change the narrative and neither does Jesus. Moses "gave" the Law and John and Jesus do not change a jot or tittle, *Mat 5:17 Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. Mat 5:18 For verily I say unto you, **Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled**. Mat 5:19 Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. Mat 5:20 For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven*.

As Malachi, the last of the OT prophets, stated, *Mal 4:4 Remember ye **the law of Moses my servant**, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments. Mal 4:5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: Mal 4:6 And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse*. The law of Moses was

in place and would stay in place and that is just about the last word that God gives the people for 500 years.

But the reality is, it **wasn't Moses law and it was not given by Moses**, it was only given **to Moses**, *Gal 3:19 What is the use of the Law? It was given later to show that we sin. But it was only supposed to last until the coming of that descendant who was given the promise. In fact, angels gave the Law to Moses, and he gave it to the people*. CEV. The law was written by the finger of God, *Exo 31:18 And he gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God.* Incidentally, the same finger that wrote in the dust, when the woman was taken in adultery.

Moses went up the Mountain to receive the law and as such he was a custodian, but he never owned it. He never had the imagination to author it, and being a sinful man, it could not come from him. And all those Jews who followed him were tainted with sin, and all who looked to him in the vain hope that they could be saved were wrong, *Joh 5:45 Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. Joh 5:46 For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: **for he wrote of me**. Joh 5:47 But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words*? Moses wrote about Christ and the Jews did not believe Him.

Moses carried the law on two tables of stone, but the reality was that Christ wrote it, and would write it on the hearts of His people, and so the meaning of the law and the ordinances surrounding the law was derived from Christ. It was not the law for laws sake, but law with a meaning that transcended this life. The whole meaning of the Law was to be found in the person of Christ, from the furniture of the Tabernacle, from the offerings for sins, from the laws showing duty to neighbours and above all else duty to God, all of this service and worship, was found to be outworked in His life and death.

This is what is coming into focus with Jesus ministry. It is not about overthrowing Moses, it is about revealing the true meaning of the Law and expounding it by His life. So Jesus could say, *Mat 5:17 Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil*. **Jesus was the law**, but much more, He was grace and truth, *Joh 1:17 For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.*

There were men who opposed Jesus in His task. There were men stuck fast in the OT ritual, and they had created an image of God which bore little resemblance to the God of the Bible. They were not the common people, the poor who He came to free from the tyranny of slavery invented by a false application of the law, as Jesus said, *Luk 4:18 The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted,*

to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, Luk 4:19 To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

He would indeed free these people, but the sworn enemies were fighting against Him, Act 4:26 The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. *Act 4:27 For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, Act 4:28 For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done*. The religious leaders, those who should have known better but did not, the scribes and Pharisees, had so misinterpreted the law, it had come to mean something else, and so "woes" were denounced against them.

Against this background Jesus reinvigorates the Law and interprets it for mankind. They need new vessel to hold the truth of the Gospel, because their old vessels were too limited by the human nature that corrupted them. Paul puts it in this way, *Eph 4:21 if, as I take it, you have heard Him and in union with Him have been taught the truth as it is seen in Jesus, Eph 4:22 to lay aside, with your former way of living, your old self which is on the way to destruction in accordance with its deceptive impulses; Eph 4:23 and to have a new attitude of mind Eph 4:24 and* ***put on the new self*** *which has been created in the likeness of God, which fruits in right and holy living inspired by the truth*. Williams.

Again in Corinthians he says, *2Co 5:17 Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new*.....and *Rom 12:2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God*. This would have resonated with Luke as he was Paul's companion, and would have talked about the new life in Christ, often.

John says something similar in his Gospel, *Joh 3:3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Joh 3:4 Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Joh 3:5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. Joh 3:6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Joh 3:7 Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again*.

There it is stated in many ways, a new man, a new self, a new creature, a new mind, a new birth. In Christ there is a whole new life. Luke and John are saying the same thing using different analogies. John uses the Wind or Spirit blowing upon a man, *Joh 3:8 The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the*

sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. Luke uses the new wineskins.

Then Luke talks about "patches", bits of new cloth on the old garment of Moses. We are not given a patchwork quilt, a patched garment, but white robes, *Rev 7:9 After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; Rev 7:10 And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb*. What an insult to Christ, if we think that we are just patched up.

We are not rubbed down and resprayed, we are made new, and this is the work of God.

But, *Luk 5:39 No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith, The old is better*. People don't like change and are more comfortable with old ways, the old seems better, well established, taste better. Change involves altering what you think and do, how you conduct your life. Of course the people would find it difficult to change but change they must if they are to go on with Christ.

To many, Christianity is something they "take up", they say, "I am going to be a Christian". They think that by behaving in a certain way, adopting new patterns of behaviour, is what God wants. No, because first they must be changed. They are not made different by copying behaviour, that is just putting new wine into old skins, the are not changed by patching up their old self, that will end up in failure, tearing itself apart. A new life requires a new body. You must be born again.

If you are not born again, you will merely have a patch on your garment, you will be a poor representation of who Christ could make you. You will not be 100 per cent committed to Christ because you will never be any thing but a burst vessel. You will never ever hold the new wine of the Kingdom of Heaven.

This is the most important teaching to understand, above all else, that you cannot even get started with Jesus unless you are born again. This is the starting gate, the beginning, the entry to life and you do not have anything in Him until you are born again, regenerated, a new man, capable of holding and understanding this truth.

Do not engage anyone on religious subject unless you have established this point. **Except a man is born again** he cannot see, he will not understand and he will not hear, because he is of this world. That goes for all religious groups

and denominations, because without the new wine, the new man, you will be dealing with the dead and they who are dead are dead to Christ.

We go to Jesus as little children, not learned men, and as such become citizens of heaven, *Mat 18:3 And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven*.

36. Whose corn is it? *Luke 6:1 - 5*

Luk 6:1 And it came to pass on the second sabbath after the first, that he went through the corn fields; and his disciples plucked the ears of corn, and did eat, rubbing them in their hands. Luk 6:2 And certain of the Pharisees said unto them, Why do ye that which is not lawful to do on the sabbath days? Luk 6:3 And Jesus answering them said, Have ye not read so much as this, what David did, when himself was an hungred, and they which were with him; Luk 6:4 How he went into the house of God, and did take and eat the shewbread, and gave also to them that were with him; which it is not lawful to eat but for the priests alone? Luk 6:5 And he said unto them, That the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath.

Another Sabbath another controversy. This time it is not in the Synagogue, but in the cornfield. As Jesus went on His way with His disciples, they plucked ears of wheat, and what was done on this day was condemned by the Pharisees but it could be done without causing the slightest offence on any other day of the week. The offence as they saw it, had been committed against a “day”, an inanimate object, a concept of time, the progress of the earth in one rotation, as far as they were concerned. They might have just as well said, “You have offended us by walking in the wrong direction, by not following us”.

They did not know for certain that this day was even the Sabbath, and the only way to know for certain was to have a continuous record going back to the time of the giving of the manna, which occurred every day, but on the day before the Sabbath they collected twice as much, so no work was done on the Sabbath, *Exo 16:21 And they gathered it every morning, every man according to his eating: and when the sun waxed hot, it melted. Exo 16:22 And it came to pass, **that on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread**, two omers for one man: and all the rulers of the congregation came and told Moses. Exo 16:23 And he said unto them, This is that which the LORD hath said, To morrow is the rest of the holy sabbath unto the LORD: bake that which ye will bake to day, and seethe that ye will seethe; and that which remaineth over lay up for you to be kept until the morning*.

The manna, the bread from heaven, normally lasted for the day only, *Exo 16:24 And they laid it up till the morning, as Moses bade: and it did not stink, neither*

was there any worm therein. Exo 16:25 And Moses said, Eat that to day; for to day is a sabbath unto the LORD: to day ye shall not find it in the field. That is how they knew it was the Sabbath day.

The Christian should give some thought to this passage. God was prepared to feed the people in the wilderness every day, but if they were lazy, if they thought that they could have a day off other than a Sabbath, from collecting their food, they were wrong. God provided the food but He did not collect it for them. Lazy people who only go to a church on one day, and who do not seek the Lord everyday will not be fed except on stinking worms. Christianity is every day with Jesus.

Jesus recalls the manna and likens it to Himself, *Joh 6:49 Your fathers did eat **manna** in the wilderness, and are dead. Joh 6:50 This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. Joh 6:51 I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world*.

He could have just as well used the showbread for an analogy, “Your fathers did eat **shewbread** in the wilderness, and are dead”. This showbread was the bread made by the priests, for the priests, *Exo 25:30 And thou shalt set upon the table shewbread before me alway. put on a table in the Tabernacle*. It was a symbol of Christ and His care and nourishment for His people, and it was the task of the Kohathites to prepare it, *1Ch 9:32 And other of their brethren, of the sons of the Kohathites, were over the shewbread, **to prepare it every sabbath***. The Kohathites also carried the Tabernacle furniture when the camp of Israel moved, *Num 10:21 And the Kohathites set forward, bearing the sanctuary: and the other did set up the tabernacle against they came*.

The priests made 12 loaves of showbread, *Lev 24:5 And thou shalt take fine flour, and **bake twelve cakes** thereof: two tenth deals shall be in one cake. Lev 24:6 And thou shalt set them in two rows, six on a row, upon the pure table before the LORD. Lev 24:7 And thou shalt put pure frankincense upon each row, that it may be on the bread for a memorial, even an offering made by fire unto the LORD. Lev 24:8 **Every sabbath** he shall set it in order before the LORD continually, being taken from the children of Israel by an everlasting covenant. Lev 24:9 And it shall be Aaron's and his sons'; and they shall eat it in the holy place: for it is most holy unto him of the offerings of the LORD made by fire by a perpetual statute*.

The term “showbread” literally means according to Keil and Delitzsch, bread of the presence or bread of the face,

> "the "Bread of the Face (**לֶחֶם פָּנִים**), the mode of preparing and placing the bread was to lie continually before (**לְפָנַי**) Jehovah. These loaves were called "bread of the face" (shew-bread), because they were to lie before the face of Jehovah as a meat-offering presented by the children of Israel, not as food for Jehovah, but as a symbol of the spiritual food which Israel was to prepare, a figurative representation of the calling it had received from God; so that bread and wine, which stood upon the table by the side of the loaves, as the fruit of the labour bestowed by Israel upon the soil of its inheritance, were a symbol of its spiritual labour in the kingdom of God, the spiritual vineyard of its Lord."

All of this knowledge would have been known by the Pharisees, but they just could not get beyond the day, the Sabbath day, in which the saw the law, an immoveable object, set in stone. They would in time, invent those laws for which they are well known, such as who switches the light on, on a Sabbath day, or you shall not carry pencils and money on that day, and even throwing a toothpick into a fire was considered a violation of the Sabbath day.

You can see how the unregenerate mind of the Jew worked. He was constantly looking for objects which were associated with the day that would render him in violation of the day. He knew that it was not legal, according to Moses, to light a fire on the Sabbath, *Exo 35:3 Ye shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations upon the sabbath day.* When a man was found gathering sticks he was tried and given the death sentence, *Num 15:32 And while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man that gathered sticks upon the sabbath day. Num 15:33 And they that found him gathering sticks brought him unto Moses and Aaron, and unto all the congregation……. Num 15:36 And all the congregation brought him without the camp, and stoned him with stones, and he died; as the LORD commanded Moses.*

I imagine that the Jew sat down and seriously looked at all the objects associated with fire and came up with a list of "what not to do" with fire on the Sabbath and eventually, when they invented tooth picks, they just added them to the list of things not to burn. The Sabbath was relatively easy to police because it could be seen in the outward behaviour of a man, and his devotion to the day, in the many types of observances he made. But what his heart was doing and what his mind was thinking could not be judged.

So the men got at Jesus religion, by observing the outward behaviour and used that to interpret His motive. They had completely missed the point of the Sabbath, which was a "day" in advance of its time, because it gave them a day off every week, to enjoy the Lord, I*sa 58:12 And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of*

paths to dwell in. Isa 58:13 ***If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day****; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: Isa 58:14 Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.*

It was a day of freedom and fellowship with the Lord. It was a day off from the rigours of life to concentrate upon God and the prospect of enjoying Him forever. It was not given to contemplate your navel, do things that pleased you, concentrate on things which did not involve God, like sticks of wood or particular days of the week.

When I became a Christian, I thought that just obeying the law, unthinkingly obedience, was all I needed to do. I thought that the Christian ought to obey the Sabbath, and in doing so, I thought I could amass "browny points". How wrong I was. I remember that Sunday well. I had something wrong with my car and I wrestled about going out and fixing it. You see, in my mind, Sunday was the Sabbath and I just ignorantly believed that. Eventually, I went and fixed the car, and O what guilt I felt at having done that. It was of course a false guilt, my conscience smiting me, but I had not instructed my conscience correctly. I had fed into it a false teaching which issued in a false response, guilt when there should have been none.

The Pharisees were not concerned about Jesus breaking the law of God, they were only concerned about their sensibilities. Jesus had offended them not the Sabbath. They were not concerned with the welfare of their fellow man that had a need. It was their fixation on the Sabbath, and that was sacrosanct, but they held it as hypocrites, *Luk 13:14 And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the sabbath day, and said unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the sabbath day. Luk 13:15 The Lord then answered him, and said, Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering*?

It was getting personal, and would ratchet up, until they were so mad with Jesus they would kill Him, *Luk 6:11 And they were filled with madness; and communed one with another what they might do to Jesus*.

Jesus reply, which contributed to their growing resentment was simple and profound, *Luk 6:3 And Jesus answering them said, Have ye not read so much as this, what David did, when himself was an hungred, and they which were with him; Luk 6:4 How he went into the house of God, and did take and eat the shewbread, and gave also to them that were with him; which it is not lawful to*

eat but for the priests alone? Luk 6:5 And he said unto them, That the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath.

Jesus takes them to an incident in the life of David to illustrate to the Pharisees that there was a precedent for what He is doing. David is fleeing from Saul who is out to kill him. He and his friends are hungry, so they go to the priests to get bread and weapons. David says, *1Sa 21:3 Do you have any food you can give me? Could you spare five loaves of bread?" 1Sa 21:4 "The only bread I have is the sacred bread," the priest told David. "You can have it if your soldiers didn't sleep with women last night." 1Sa 21:5 "Of course we didn't sleep with women," David answered. "I never let my men do that when we're on a mission. They have to be acceptable to worship God even when we're on a regular mission, and today we're on a special mission." 1Sa 21:6 The only bread the priest had was the sacred bread that he had taken from the place of worship after putting out the fresh loaves. So he gave it to David*. CEV.

David lies about his reason for wanting bread (*today we're on a special mission*) which Jesus passes over, but concentrates on the bread that David wanted. It was the bread of the face, the shewbread, which had not been eaten and was replaced by fresh bread on the Sabbath day. The bread had passed its sell by date, and you could argue that it had also served its religious purpose. But Jesus says it was against the law of Moses for anyone to eat it except the priests. Jesus says that David was blameless in taking the bread because he was hungry, like Jesus own disciples.

The human need had trumped the letter of the law. It was the same as healing the sick on the Sabbath, it was not work, it was duty. The law was not a set of statutes without reference to God and man. In essence the law was summed up in two commands, *Mar 12:30 And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. Mar 12:31 And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.* ***There is none other commandment greater than these***.

Matthew gives a little more information than Luke, *Mat 12:5 Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless? Mat 12:6 But I say unto you, That in this place is one greater than the temple. Mat 12:7 But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless.*

But Jesus says more than this, *Luk 6:5 And he said unto them, That the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath.* He is effectively saying, “no matter what you may think, I am the Lord of the Sabbath day, and I and my disciples will do what I please on this day”. It was not up to these mealy mouthed Pharisees to set the

agenda for the Sabbath, to set the boundaries of the Sabbath, to stop His disciples eating, but He alone would say what could and could not be done.

We are today worried about causing offences and offending people. This verse is often at the root of the problem, *Luk 17:1 Jesus said to his disciples: There will always be something that causes people to sin. But anyone who causes them to sin is in for trouble. A person who causes even one of my little followers to sin Luk 17:2 would be better off thrown into the ocean with a heavy stone tied around their neck. Luk 17:3 So be careful what you do. Correct any followers of mine who sin, and forgive the ones who say they are sorry.* CEV. You can cause offence by telling a person that they are committing a sin and that is not wrong. There are offences and offences.

The churches are so weak and feeble that they will shy away from correcting people who are just plain wrong, anti-scriptural and anti-Christ. If they had stood up to these emotional bullies, torn their ungodly arguments to shreds, not caved into there tears, thought for two seconds about the arguments that they were giving, the churches would not be facing the decline in this moment. If they had thrown down the modern day Pharisees as Jesus threw down the arguments of those in His day, we would have still had persecution, but we would have been able to hold our heads high.

And where has this "I don't want to offend anyone attitude got us? It has led to a broken and confused society, broken families and broken church. The fear of offending will lead to a generation being ushered into hell at a rate unseen in history. The true source of stumbling is Christ, *1Pe 2:7 Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, 1Pe 2:8 And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.*

Jesus stood up to those bullies in the cornfields, gave them good arguments and above all laid down His authority. You are offended, good, it may save your soul.

37. The withered right hand. *Luke 6:6 - 11*

Luk 6:6 And it came to pass also on another sabbath, that he entered into the synagogue and taught: and there was a man whose right hand was withered. Luk 6:7 And the scribes and Pharisees watched him, whether he would heal on the sabbath day; that they might find an accusation against him. Luk 6:8 But he knew their thoughts, and said to the man which had the withered hand, Rise up, and stand forth in the midst. And he arose and stood forth. Luk 6:9 Then said Jesus unto them, I will ask you one thing; Is it lawful on the sabbath days to do

good, or to do evil? to save life, or to destroy it? Luk 6:10 And looking round about upon them all, he said unto the man, Stretch forth thy hand. And he did so: and his hand was restored whole as the other. Luk 6:11 And they were filled with madness; and communed one with another what they might do to Jesus.

Matthew gives us more information, saying, *Mat 12:11 And he said unto them, What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out? Mat 12:12 How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days*.

This Sabbath, Jesus is in the Synagogue and there just happened to be there a man with a withered right hand. I say "just happened to be" because the whole scenario seems to be a set up. The scribes and Pharisees are out to get Jesus so "*that they might find an accusation against him".* The man with the withered hand is healed but his sins are not forgiven and the Pharisees may have well co-opted him for this confrontation with Jesus, and the man went along with it.

Jesus could just as well have given another teaching and avoided a confrontation, but He is neither coward nor an appeaser of men. He knew what they were up to and He would show them how little they cared for the man. Mark gives us a bit more information, *Mar 3:4 And he saith unto them, Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill? But they held their peace. Mar 3:5 And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other*.

These Pharisees who had set a trap for Jesus were caught in their own trap and they knew it, and so before the whole congregation they shut up. I imagine there were some there cheering in silence as you may be cheering now. These pillars of the Synagogue had met their match and if looks could kill, they would have, for Jesus looked on them with anger, and that anger they would see fully on the Day of Judgement.

Jesus is appalled at their hardness of heart. Porosis (πώρωσις), the Greek word for callousness or hardness, means something else, porous. Their hearts were callous and full of holes. Their hearts were dying and in need of a transplant.

The Pharisees counted the man with the withered hand a worse case than an animal. At least they pulled the sheep out of the pit but this man, no, they wouldn't lift a finger to help him. He was just an object with which to catch Jesus out and they had no real concern for him apart from that. Such is the wickedness of the human heart.

Do you remember that story I told about John Calvin,

> When Jacques Gruet, a theologian with differing views, placed a letter in Calvin's pulpit calling him a hypocrite, he was arrested, tortured for a month and beheaded on July 26th, 1547. Gruet's own theological book was later found and burned along with his house, while his wife was thrown out into the street to watch.
>
> Michael Servetus, a Spaniard, physician, scientist and Bible scholar, suffered a worse fate. He was Calvin's long time acquaintance who resisted the authority of the Roman Catholic Church. However, he angered Calvin by returning a copy of Calvin's Institutes with critical comments in the margins. So what did Calvin do?
>
> On October 27th1553, green wood was used for the fire so Servetus would be slowly baked alive from the feet upward. For 30 minutes he screamed for mercy and prayed to
> Jesus as the fire worked its way up his body to burn the theology book strapped to his
> chest as a symbol of his heresy. Calvin summarized the execution this way:
>
> "Servetus . . . suffered the penalty due to his heresies, but was it by my will? Certainly his arrogance destroyed him not less than his impiety. And what crime was it of mine if
> our Council, at my exhortation, indeed, but in conformity with the opinion of several Churches, took vengeance on his execrable blasphemies?"

Go to all you who worship the ground Calvin walks upon. He may have been doctrinally correct but his heart was desperately wicked, his heart petrified by looking too much at his own rightness. How far away he was from the Gospel, *Eze 36:26 A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh*. He thought that he was preserving Christ but in fact he dirtied His name. Are you obliged to follow men like that? No you are not, for you follow Christ.

This is a warning to people who profess to be Christian. As Isaac said when he was deceived, *Gen 27:21 And Isaac said unto Jacob, Come near, I pray thee, that I may feel thee, my son, whether thou be my very son Esau or not. Gen 27:22 And Jacob went near unto Isaac his father; and he felt him, and said,* ***The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau*****.** We may sound like the Gospel of Christ but our deeds can be the deeds of the devil, so do not practice the deeds of a man.

Christ sets the man with the withered hand in the midst of the Synagogue for all to see. This son of Judah is going to do a miracle, which to the Jews would remind them of their history and the dividing of the Kingdom in the time of Solomon. Let us just go through this to give a better picture of what I am saying.

You recall the after Solomon died his son Rehoboam became king and imposed a harder rule on Israel, *1Ki 12:13 And the king answered the people roughly, and forsook the old men's counsel that they gave him; 1Ki 12:14 And spake to them after the counsel of the young men, saying, My father made your yoke heavy, and I will add to your yoke: my father also chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions.* This upset the people because they had been taxed excessively by Solomon, to keep his empire going and to complete his building projects. **Opentheword.org** gives an explanation of what happened:

> It was the construction of a second palace that became the root of the problem. Solomon was not content to live in his Father's house and built a huge palace to house his 700 wives and 300 concubines (1 Kings 7:1-11). It took 13 years to construct, compared to just 7 years for the temple.
>
> It appears the palace was built largely due to Solomon's marriage to the daughter of the Egyptian Pharaoh. It proved very controversial. People in Israel were obviously questioning its necessity, because Solomon felt compelled to publicly justify its construction. People were upset and Solomon was in old fashioned damage control. Let's read Solomon's lame excuse:
>
> *2Ch 8:11 And Solomon brought up the daughter of Pharaoh out of the city of David unto the house that he had built for her: for he said, My wife shall not dwell in the house of David king of Israel, because the places are holy, whereunto the ark of the LORD hath come.*
>
> Solomon had married the daughter of the Pharaoh. Because she was Egyptian, Solomon said she couldn't live in David's palace because the Ark of the Covenant had passed through the old palace.
>
> Reading between the lines: his Egyptian wife obviously hadn't converted to Judaism, *1Ki 11:1 But king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites; Ki 11:2 Of the nations concerning which the LORD said unto the children of Israel, Ye*

shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clave unto these in love.

She was probably demanding a room where she could worship her Egyptian gods. Solomon rationalized her presence in the old palace would desecrate this sacred ground. So he built a palace primarily for her, complete with Egyptian gods and it was all paid for by the citizens of Israel.

You can imagine this did not go over well with taxpayers, who wondered why he married her in the first place. Aside from this notorious project, Solomon constructed numerous other building all requiring taxes. (2 Chronicles 8:1-8)

You will also note that he did not tax Judah, as Wayne Brindle explains:

….. when Solomon formed his 12 districts for the purposes of taxation and supplying the needs of his court, he did not include Judah (1 Kings 4). Judah apparently had tax-free status. Most of the district appointees were also Judahites or pro-Judahites.

In addition Solomon's building projects were concentrated in Judah (the temple, the palace, the Millo and wall of Jerusalem, Ezion-geber, the copper mines, Debir, etc.), whereas most of the taxes and forced labourers came from the northern tribes.

The feeling of the Israelites is shown in the Psalm, *Psa 78:67 Moreover he refused the tabernacle of Joseph, and chose not the tribe of Ephraim: Psa 78:68 But chose the tribe of Judah, the mount Zion which he loved*. When it is recalled that Ephraim, because of its dominance, it became a synonym for Israel (the Northern Kingdom) it is not surprising that God's choice of Jerusalem as His holy city and of Judah as the tribe through which the Messiah would come, would result in intense jealousy and envy in the north.

The split came and Ephraim became Israel, the ten tribes with Judah the outcast tribe, *1Ki 11:29 And it came to pass at that time when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, that the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him in the way; and he had clad himself with a new garment; and they two were alone in the field: 1Ki 11:30 And Ahijah caught the new garment that was on him, and rent it in twelve pieces:* ***1Ki 11:31*** *And he said to Jeroboam,* ***Take thee ten pieces: for thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel, Behold, I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon****, and will give ten tribes to thee: 1Ki 11:32 (But he shall have one tribe for my servant David's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake, the city which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel:)* Jeroboam 10, Rehoboam 1.

Now this is where I return to our story, Rehoboam of the 10 tribes, had set up two places of worship, Dan in the north and Bethel in the south (north of Jerusalem).

These altars were designed to draw Israel away from the worship centre in Jerusalem, which was the seat of Jeroboam of Judah. Still with me?

An event occurs which shows God's displeasure against Rehoboam (of the 10 tribes), *1Ki 13:1 And, behold, there came a man of God out of Judah by the word of the LORD unto Bethel: and Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense. 1Ki 13:2 And he cried against the altar in the word of the LORD, and said, O altar, altar, thus saith the LORD; Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee. 1Ki 13:3 And he gave a sign the same day, saying, This is the sign which the LORD hath spoken; Behold, the altar shall be rent, and the ashes that are upon it shall be poured out. 1Ki 13:4 And it came to pass, when king Jeroboam heard the saying of the man of God, which had cried against the altar in Bethel, that he put forth his hand from the altar, saying, Lay hold on him. And* ***his hand, which he put forth against him, dried up****, so that he could not pull it in again to him. 1Ki 13:5 The altar also was rent, and the ashes poured out from the altar, according to the sign which the man of God had given by the word of the LORD. 1Ki 13:6 And the king answered and said unto the man of God, Intreat now the face of the LORD thy God, and pray for me, that my hand may be restored me again.* ***And the man of God besought the LORD, and the king's hand was restored him again****, and became as it was before*.

King Rehoboam was the man with the withered hand and now his doppelganger appears in the Synagogue where Jesus was. I think that the man with "the withered right hand" is put in the picture for a reason, to tie us back to this event. Galilee was part of Rehoboam's kingdom. His progeny are the scribes and Pharisees, the people who went around making new laws, making new altars, which it was not lawful to do. Rehoboam like the Pharisees would take hold of the man of God, but were stopped in their tracks by the power of the Lord. Their altars were broken, spilling out the ashes of their sacrifices, their bonfire of the vanities, leaving nothing to show of their worth and works except blackened, burnt specks.

They are like the people Paul talks of, *1Co 3:11 For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 1Co 3:12 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; 1Co 3:13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it,* ***because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is***.

They could have brought any other sickness to be healed, as they did on other occasions, but they brought specifically, "the man with the withered hand", to test whether there was any change in their hearts from the days of the Kings

until now. There was not. It was all about power, control over the people, dominating the poor and unlearned. It was a fight between good and evil.

The southern Capital, Jerusalem, was again pitched against the poor in the north. Jesus had much to do and to say about this as we shall see.

38. The devil who was a disciple. *Luke 6:12 - 16*

Luk 6:12 And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. Luk 6:13 And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles; Luk 6:14 Simon, (whom he also named Peter,) and Andrew his brother, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew, Luk 6:15 Matthew and Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called Zelotes, Luk 6:16 And Judas the brother of James, and ***Judas Iscariot, which also was the traitor****.....Mar 3:19 And Judas Iscariot, which also betrayed him:*

The disciples, we have suggested before, were very young men, excepting for Peter, who was a bit older and married. I have put their ages under 18 years. In the Mishnah, the oral interpretations of Torah (law) at the time of Jesus, it shows a very regimented educational/life path for young boys in Judaism:

> "At five years old [one is fit] for the Scripture, at ten years the Mishnah (oral Torah, interpretations) at thirteen for the fulfilling of the commandments, at fifteen the Talmud (making Rabbinic interpretations), at eighteen the bride-chamber, at twenty pursuing a vocation, at thirty for authority (able to teach others)."
>
> So, in the time of Jesus, almost all Jewish young men were married, and usually by age 18. But in the Gospels, Peter is the only disciple known to have been married (Matthew 8:14-15). No other disciples' wives are ever mentioned. So this tells us that the disciples may have all been under 20, with some as young as 15. Their youth meant that they had not taken in the teaching and prejudices of age and were a relatively fresh page to write on.

Jesus had many disciples but twelve were selected to be His close inner circle, perhaps because it was easier to handle a small number, but also it was a typical number, like the 12 tribes of Israel. There were many other disciples as well, *Luk 10:1 After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself would come*. We must not forget that there were women also who contributed financially to their operations, *Luk 8:1 And it came to pass afterward, that he went throughout every city and village, preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God: and the twelve were with him, Luk 8:2 And* ***certain women****, which had been healed of evil spirits and*

infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils, Luk 8:3 And Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto him of their substance. We cannot say how many disciples Jesus went around with at any one time but when they were all together it must have seemed like a small army.

I want to look at just one of the disciples, Judas Iscariot. Who was this man Judas? Judas Iscariot is the only one of the **apostles** whom the Bible (potentially) identifies by his town of origin. Some scholars have linked his surname "Iscariot," to Queriot (or Kerioth), a town located south of Jerusalem in Judea.

A few years ago we suggested the following (**The hard sayings of Jesus, Part 14. A tale of 3 kisses. 2014**).

> Judas was a Judean, NOT a Galilean. ALL the other disciples apparently were Galileans. He was in many respects the odd one out, sitting uncomfortably among his fellow disciples. What is Judas doing at this select gathering in Bethany? He is there because he is the son of Simon the Leper. *Joh 6:71 He alluded to Judas, the son of Simon the Iscariot. For he it was who, though one of the Twelve, was afterwards to betray Him.* Weymouth..... *Joh 6:71 (Now he was speaking about Judas son of Simon Iscariot, because this one--one of the twelve--was going to betray him.)* Lexham..... *Joh 6:71 And he spake of Judas, Simon's son , Iscariot, for he was about to deliver him up, being one of the twelve.* Youngs.
>
> It is possible that Judas co-conspirator, was his own father Simon and it was this that gained Judas such easy access to the Sanhedrin.
>
> **Judas** was an unsavoury character. He was also avaricious. He could not see the kindness Mary did to Jesus as other than a waste of money. But Judas was also a thief. *Joh 12:4 Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because **he was a thief**, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein*. So it is that God in His infinite wisdom uses all men and all circumstances to bring Glory upon Himself. *Pro 16:4 The LORD has made everything for his own purpose, even wicked people for the day of trouble.* GW.

He was given the name Judas, which is the Greek version of the word Yehudah, i.e., of the tribe of Judah, the Jewish people. It was a name that carried a certain pride in being Jewish and his parents called him Judah, as Leah called her son, *Gen 29:35 And she conceived again, and bare a son: and she said, Now will I praise the LORD: therefore she called his name Judah; and left bearing*. He was of the same tribe as

Jesus, so theremust have been some sort of kinship between then. Did they know each other well before he started His ministry?

We don't know what Judas suffered as a child. He was likely the son of Simon (aka the leper), *Joh 6:71 He spake of Judas Iscariot the son of Simon: for he it was that should betray him, being one of the twelve.* See our comments in "The hard sayings of Jesus". If he were the son of a leper, he would have suffered the ignominy of his father. He might have come to Christ through seeing his father healed by Jesus, but that is speculation.

But babies grow into men and they change, and the epi-genetics of life, his circumstances, gradually worked to turn him into the person he would become. How did he get to be a traitor? Judas did not start in that way. Yes, He was born in sin, and like all men desperately wicked but not overtly wicked to start with, as a baby he could not do much. He was a sinner like you and me, but as he developed, his life changed so much, that by his end of life he was an anti-Christ. There was nothing special about him, no outstanding feature which marked him out for such treachery. He was no doubt an angelic child and a naughty boy, loved by his mother, indulged, and whenever he could "trying it on" and being bad when no one was looking.

Judas, like all men, needed a new birth. Jesus told the Pharisee this very thing, for it was necessary under the Law, under the first Covenant, *Joh 3:3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God*. If Judas was going to get to heaven, he needed transforming, he needed regenerating. I suppose that going to the synagogue gave him confidence that he was going to heaven, he presumed that he was written among the chosen, one of God's own people, elect, but he had like so many people, not considered how he could get there. It's the pure and applied word again. Being born again is the pure word of Scripture, a theoretical doctrine. How it actually happens to me is the applied word and that is different.

Like all children with a religious upbringing, Judas thought that he was right and that he needed for nothing and his parents had taught him so. His parents, like me, and my parents as well, had not urged upon our children the necessity of a new birth. It certainly was not taught at home. I went to Sunday school where they never once taught the new birth. When I was older and went to a CofE church, they never told me of the new birth because they presumptuously held that it happened when I was christened. They were steering me away from Christianity like the Pharisees, *Mat 23:15 You Pharisees and teachers of the Law of Moses are in for trouble! You're nothing but show-offs. You travel over land and sea to win one follower. And when you have done so, you make that person* ***twice as fit for hell*** *as you are.* CEV.

Christianity became something you took up, something you followed, but never something you were changed into. Judaism, the forerunner of Christianity required a change, a new birth. You could take up religion, Judaism, Christianity, **but God would not take up you, without a new birth.**

This OT doctrine of the new birth is stated in these words, *Deu 10:16 Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked…….. Deu 30:6 And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live*. You may ask, where is the new birth in that? Well, how do you suppose that you will get a new heart, without a new birth, without a complete change in what makes you tick, about what pumps your life?

And like so many children of believing parents, they are left to themselves, the parents thinking that they will pick up the faith by osmosis, by mere association with them as a Christian. But the fact is the child will pick up nothing but hypocrisy, he will imitate what he is supposed to imitate, jump through the hoops set before him and bask in the parental applause but the child is a hypocrite. He is made one by the parents, and the Proverb that says, *Pro 22:6 Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it,* is equally true of neglect and error, for they will follow the way of error, because we have taught them error.

We parents must accept our responsibility, and face up to the truth that we have neglected this teaching, and our children suffer. We have by neglect, consigned them to hell and in this they are no different from Judas. We are guilty, as much as they are. We have not taught them the absolute necessity of the New Birth.

Without the constraints of a new heart, Judas was set on the path to destruction. There was nothing holding him back, the teaching he had received might have been good but, *Heb 4:1 Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. Heb 4:2 For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them,* ***not being mixed with faith in them that heard it****.* Judas is like our children and all men who have not been born again.

Sin of course, is manifold in it varieties. There are all sorts of sin, and the smallest sin is as bad as the greatest sin in God’s sight, and by breaking one command, you break all, *Jas 2:10 If you obey every law except one, you are still guilty of breaking them all*. CEV.

Judas had a besetting sin, one that seemed to come up and bite him more than others. Some men are given to drunkenness, others to pornography, some are murderers, and so on, but Judas was greedy. It may have started like all sins, in a small way, taking something for himself, and not considering the person he was taking from, to satisfy his appetite. He kidded himself that God was not watching and he felt good about it. I saw a short video clip of a boy stealing. Judas was like that little boy who in his grandparents shop, thinking that nobody saw him helped himself to some of their cash. On the way out he noticed a video camera filming him and he was smitten in his conscience, put the money back and with his hands together solemnly

bowed to the camera in a sign of contrition. There's always one who sees, even if we don't believe it.

From little acorns great oak trees grow, and more accomplished in his sins, Judas began to get quite good at being greedy, and managed to develop a concealment regime based on charity. When Jesus picked him up as a disciple and then promoted him to an Apostle, he was well skilled in his art. The moral outrage shown at the woman, for daring to waste such precious ointment instead of giving the cash to the poor (read instead Judas) seemed altruistic, *Joh 12:4 Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him, Joh 12:5 Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? Joh 12:6 This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but* ***because he was a thief****, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein*.

He positioned himself to be the charity treasurer, so that he held the bag of cash and could help himself to it whenever he wanted. He became a greedy person. Not caring for anyone except himself and above all he cared about money, the root of all evil, *1Ti 6:10 For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows*. James says the same thing, *Jas 4:1 From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Jas 4:2 Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Jas 4:3 Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts*.

He was outwardly a pillar of the apostleship, a caring man, a sensitive man, looking to the needs of others, but inwardly he was eaten up with greed and lust. Jesus kept him close for He knew what this man was like. This kind and charitable man was a thief, and many people take his cloak of charitability to steal.

It culminated in the act of betrayal, the true moment that will live in infamy, and for thirty pieces of silver he betrayed his friend, *Psa 41:9 Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me*…… *Mat 26:48 Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he: hold him fast. Mat 26:49 And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, master; and kissed him. Mat 26:50 And Jesus said unto him,* ***Friend, wherefore art thou come****? Then came they, and laid hands on Jesus, and took him*.

Men try and find sophisticated reasons for this betrayal, from Judas being a freedom fighter hoping for the kingdom to come in through this king, or that Judas was some sort of super-patriot who got disillusioned when Jesus did not live up to his expectation. But we need look no further for a reason than this, that his avarice had got the better of him. *Mat 26:14 Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, Mat 26:15 And said unto them,* ***What will ye give me, and I***

will deliver him unto you? *And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. Mat 26:16 And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him*.

Judas did not care for the kingdom, he did not care for what was right and he did not care for Jesus, just like our children don't care for Jesus, just like the people in the world don't care about Jesus. He is a cuss word to them or someone to be used in a ceremony or festival and afterwards put in a box. And all that started from simple acts in childhood and like Judas, grew into a man who would betray Jesus.

Judas is a warning from history. He was "everyman" as he started his life. He did not seek, even if he were told of it, the new birth, and being unchanged in his life he became religious, not Christian. He aspired to be a leader, even doing miracles, but without that change in his nature, the new birth, it was just hypocrisy. You can be a devil working miracles as it says, *Rev 16:14 For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty*.

He betrayed an innocent man to gratify his lust, and although he repented of what he had done, *Mat 27:3 Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, Mat 27:4 Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that.* It was too late and he was so full of remorse he hanged himself, he committed suicide.

We do not all go the way of Judas, but if men do not get born again, and they do not care enough to follow Jesus, but live for themselves, they will assuredly join Judas Iscariot. He is not alone in hell. How you die, sadly defines perhaps the life you lived and what you lived for. Judas hanged himself. Full of despair and without hope. I imagine a lot of people hope for a death bed repentance but you read little of that in the bible. Judas was no different from any other man sharing hell with him. He is like you, he betrayed Christ, and he suffers for it. Well spoke Spurgeon,

> The man who with pretences, enters the fold, being nought but a wolf in sheep's clothing, worries the flock more than the lion outside. There is no weapon half so deadly as a Judas-kiss. Inconsistent professors injure the gospel more than the sneering critic or the infidel. But, especially for Christ's own sake, imitate his example. Christian, lovest thou thy Saviour? Is his name precious to thee? Is his cause dear to thee? Wouldst thou see the kingdoms of the world become his? Is it thy desire that he should be glorified? Art thou longing that souls should be won to him?
>
> If so, imitate Jesus; be an "epistle of Christ, known and read of all men."

39. A universal ministry. *Luke 6:17 - 19*

Luk 6:17 And he came down with them, and stood in the plain, and the company of his disciples, and a great multitude of people out of all Judaea and Jerusalem, and from the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon, which came to hear him, and to be healed of their diseases; Luk 6:18 And they that were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed. Luk 6:19 And the whole multitude sought to touch him: for there went virtue out of him, and healed them all.

Here is the prelude to the "sermon on the plain" and it is remarkable similar to the "Sermon on the Mount". I think that that the two places are the same and that they both took place on the Mount of the Beatitudes on a fairly flat piece of land which is the plain.

The word for "plain" is πεδινός = pedinos and is only used here, coming from a derivative for "foot", so it means *level* (as easy for the *feet*) hence plain.

Capernaum is situated on the northern shore of lake Kinneret, waters of Chinnereth יָם כִּנֶּרֶת, the Hebrew name for the sea of Galilee, because it is harp shaped, hence kinnor a harp. The place of the sermon is high ground, that has a negative altitude (around 25 metres below sea level, **nearly 200 metres** above the Sea of Galilee) making it one of the lowest summits of the world. The actual location of the Sermon on the Mount is not certain, but the present site (also known as Mount Eremos) has been commemorated for more than 1600 years. So whether it is a mountain or a plain depends where you come from. Somebody who had seen the mountains of Syria, Luke for example coming from Syria, might have thought it little more than a level place whereas Matthew who new only Israel, thought it a mountain.

God did not suppress his writer's freedom of thought. That is an interesting observation because it shows one of the limits of inspiration, or rather expiration of Scriptures, *2Ti 3:16 All Scripture is **God-breathed** and profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 2Ti 3:17 so that the man of God may be perfected, being fully furnished for every good work.* If a man's life does not give him as complete a vocabulary as another man, he will express the faith differently. If the culture he is brought up in differs form another man's he will write with that in mind and have different thoughts about things. If his experiences are not the same, if his prejudices are different, if his spiritual experiences are not the same, he will express what he sees differently.

When God breathes Scripture, He breathes through the abilities and senses of a writer. He does not possess them so that they have no knowledge of what they are doing, like an automaton writing machine. God gives them wisdom differing, from the next man and conveys His word with the limitations of the human being, *2Pe 3:15 And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to* ***the wisdom given unto him*** *hath written unto you; 2Pe 3:16 As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do* ***also the other Scriptures****, unto their own destruction*. Paul's writings are Scripture.

The writers do not loose consciousness, go into a trance, nor are totally possessed, taken over, so that for the time they write, it is as if it is God alone who writes. No, they write what God tells them to write, "Thus saith The Lord" but through the persons nature and limitations. If God alone wrote the Scriptures we should not attribute human authorship, for example "John's epistle", it would be from God. Luke writes, *Luk 1:3 It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, Luk 1:4 That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed*. When Luke writes, he is writing as from God yet not as God.

Tongues like writing are subject to the one who gives it, *1Co 14:30 If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace. 1Co 14:31 For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted. 1Co 14:32 And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. 1Co 14:33 For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints*.

When you think about it, Matthew is writing from his perspective and Luke from his. They are writing to some group or other and will emphasise different matters, perhaps leaving some things that were said out of the text. You could not write everything Jesus did because you wouldn't have enough paper, *Joh 21:25 And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written*.

People came to the plain, to hear Him and to be healed. He could not preach to a load of sick people, discomfited people, people in pain and sorrow, for without the comfort of restoration, His ministry would have seemed a little hollow. We should ever be conscious of the needs of those around us, and endeavour to meet them before we preach to them. We are so keen to get our message out that we sometimes neglect a glaring need, we forget with the excited rush to get

the message out, our fellow human sufferer. It is as if we are only looking with one eye upon the scene before us and have a blind eye on the suffering.

He was thronged by the multitude, *Luk 6:19 And the whole multitude sought to touch him: for there went virtue out of him, and healed them all*, and everyone's needs were met. Can there ever have been a meeting like it. A vast crowd, milling and shouting, thrusting and crying, all desperate to touch Him, the focus of their attention. More coming into the centre to touch Him, as the healed moved out away from Him, disbelief on their faces that they had finally, miraculously, been made well. More of the sick moving in to the spaces created by the healed. Cries of pain and sorrow turning to cries of joy and praise, as each was healed by Him or a touch of His garment. And the virtue was limitless, the power δύναμις, whence dynamite, for that is the meaning of the word, and it just kept coming from Him.

I imagine that the crowd were excited and ready to hear Him and He was ready to speak to them. And it seems churlish to even think that He did not love them, not out of a sense of duty, but out of a deep concern for them. I should not mention it but for this observation among churches today, that they talk a lot about love, and loving your neighbour but there is little to show for Christian love. It is in word but not in deed.

Do we follow His example? This is from an article I read the other day called "The Significance Of Galilee To The Mission Of The Church" By Caleb Rosado, Ph.D. It is an incident from the life of Grace Stoen.

> I remember walking into my Catholic school and the Irish kids would call me nigger. When I told my parents they told me not to listen to them. My mother was a Mexican, and all her life she had been told that Mexicans were dirty and that they were no good, so she worked doubly hard to make sure that we had neat, clean uniforms. One day when I was in the second grade, I played kickball on the way to parochial school, and my shoes got scuffed. A nun made me stand in front of the class, and proceeded to humiliate me. She said I was filthy and why would I come to school looking like that.
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> We lived on the fringe of a very rich parish. The rich and the white were always favoured. Once in the second grade they expected us kids to bring envelopes with money in them. We didn't have any money. But they still asked me why I didn't put any money in the envelope? I was in the second grade and being put up for not having money in my envelope. Money was all they talked about. They wanted people to give fifty dollars. They had plaques on the wall saying who had five hundred dollars, and who had given one thousand dollars. When I was eighteen I still didn't have five hundred dollars, but I finally realized why it was

> that there was all those special memorials for people who gave money, but nobody befriended me.
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> I spent ten years of my life in that church, one day a week, and I never knew anybody. All that I saw was these family cliques and the strong, white Irish thing, so I quit. When I went to People's Temple they weren't taking any offerings. I'll never forget seeing all the races, black and white together. You always heard it couldn't be done, and they couldn't get along. Yet, at the Temple there were educated and illiterate, there were middle class and poor, there was everything there, and I was really touched by the warmness of the people. You didn't see people whispering, you know, talking about each other. Everybody was open, warm, open-hearted and getting to know one another, and I felt that my heart was just taken in by those beautiful people.

Now I don't want to go to in the "Peoples Temple" that started well and finished so very badly. The experience of this lady is what I wish to concentrate on, and her rejection by those who are supposed to know better. The people she joined with who were supposed to show the love of Christ one to another, were sadly lacking. And so many churches are like this. Firstly, money is what it is all about and the leaders get the first call on it. How many preachers charge you for healing, to go along to something that in reality is a benefit concert for themselves? Did Jesus charge for anything? They lack Paul's integrity, *1Co 9:18 What pay am I given? It is the chance to preach the good news free of charge and not to use the privileges that are mine because I am a preacher*. CEV. They also keep an old building, draining money with ongoing expenses. They only use it once a week, with a possible prayer meeting. They justify it by calling it a church, instead of a millstone around the congregation's neck. I do not blame the unbeliever for being suspicious of these churches.

Then there are the people that inhabit these places. The so called faithful, who faithfully turn up, and cough up, sometimes having the tithe imposed upon them, the O.T. Law of giving. They come together for so called worship and it satisfies something in them but does it satisfy God? They see each other for an hour or so a week and disappear until the next week.

I had a pastor once tell me that Christians are like a piece of coal on a fire and if they do not go to church, if they fall out onto the grate, they will grow cold and the fire will go out. You had to go to church as it was essential for your spiritual well being. They say, *Heb 10:25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching*. The bare face cheek of it. I do not recall this church getting together at all outside of its official meetings, inviting one another round for a meal, having personal friendships that lasted outside of a

meeting. Church consists in “meetings” and that is it. You can wander in your own manner and with whom you want, believe what you want, worship a “god” tailor made for your fantasies, but woe betide if you miss a meeting. But that verse that I read does not say **GO** to church but it does say, **be a church**.

And what of the hereafter, heaven? Are these people who meet irregularly, who only meet their “brothers and sisters” at official times, but do not meet them on other occasions, going to get a surprise in glory? They are going to live with all those they didn’t live with, cheek by jowl, in a kingdom whose Lord is Christ. I am afraid the so called “brethren” live selfish lives, doing selfish things, often with people who do not know God, because they don’t see enough of Christ in their miserable lives and the world won’t either.

Do you want to be with God’s own people, do you delight in their company, do you long for godly conversation, do you miss the people of God when they leave you? Or do you find more relaxation, better things to talk about, more fun among those who don’t know Christ, then I would say that you are not in Christ’s team and you fool yourself.

And I cannot let the pastors go without some comments on them. They are supposed to be hospitable, *1Ti 3:2 A church leader must be without fault; he must have only one wife, be sober, self-controlled, and orderly;* ***he must welcome strangers in his home****; he must be able to teach; 1Ti 3:3 he must not be a drunkard or a violent man, but gentle and peaceful; he must not love money; 1Ti 3:4 he must be able to manage his own family well and make his children obey him with all respect.* GNB. He is to be hospitable, “***he must welcome strangers in his home***”, he is according to the Greek word, φιλόξενος = philoxenos, fond of strangers, fond of guests, that is, hospitable. But it just does not happen, and in 50 years I have only been invited a couple of times to pastors homes, outside of this fellowship. They are not hospitable, and as a result do not know much about the lives of their flock and it is no wonder the people are in the same mould, with such a poor example.

I understand why people don’t go to church. They think that the people who go to church, are by and large, hypocrites, and it is true, they are. They don’t speak of Christ, they do not lead men to Christ and as long as they feel alright in themselves, they do not care. If the cap fits you, then wear it.

Jesus did not behave like the church does today, He does not behave like the Christians today, and we should not see Him with the eyes of the 20th century.

I think that these verses from Corinthians speak to the believer, but they speak firstly of Christ and His nature. Think if you will, of Christ saying this, of Himself, *1Co 13:1 What if I could speak all languages of humans and of angels? If I did not* ***love others****, I would be nothing more than a noisy gong or a clanging*

cymbal. 1Co 13:2 What if I could prophesy and understand all secrets and all knowledge? And what if I had faith that moved mountains? I would be nothing, ***unless I loved others****. 1Co 13:3 What if I gave away all that I owned and let myself be burned alive? I would gain nothing,* ***unless I loved others*****.** CEV.

I do not think Christ would ask less of us, or ask of us something that He would not do Himself. So I apply this to Him first and to myself as well. If He had lived a life of duty but without love, He would have gained nothing personally. If He or I speak swelling words like angels, great speeches, sermons on mountains, but if I do not love the people I speak to, the word is hollow, a sound that is empty, like a tinkling cymbal. The miracles I may do, do not make the man, neither do swelling words of prophecy, neither knowledge, however great, it is all in vain, unless I love the people who I am dealing with. I can give all that I have to the poor, I can even give my own life so that all that remains of me is dust and ashes, for what. It is of no gain to me without love. I can do all manner of what people call “good works” and it is worthless without love.

Love in God’s sight is the virtue that gives body, substance to what I say or do. It outlasts everything and is there at the last. The greatest memorial to a man is that he loved others as Jesus loved them.

For Jesus ministry to have any validity it must be done in love and He has shown it to the people first in a very practical way. Now having given them something in the flesh, healing the body, He turns to their spirit, to speak to their souls. And all the while He loved them.